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CLIO CHANG

THE Nation.

APRIL 20/27, 2020

COVID-19 SPECIAL ISSUE

How Not to Waste This Crisis

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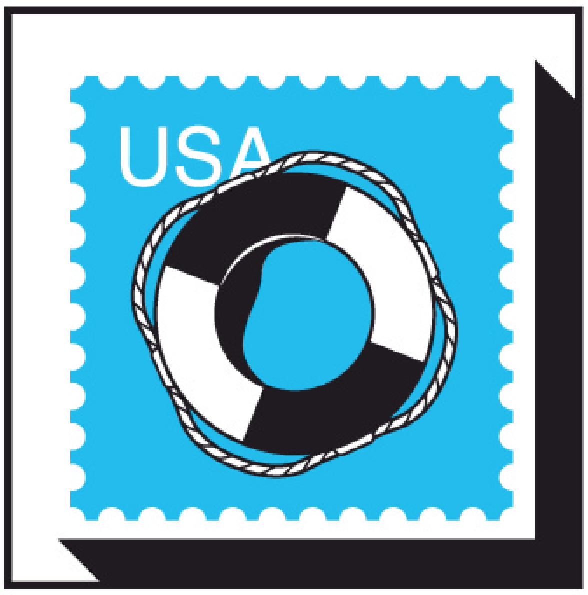
#2 We Can Afford to Beat This

ROHAN GREY

#3 The Mobilization That Must Start Now

JAMES K. GALBRAITH



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HIGH FIDELITY'S REBOOT | SANDERS FOR PRESIDENT
THE Nation.
SAINT BILL?

Letters

@thenation.com

Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down

I was disappointed to read *The Nation*'s endorsement of Bernie Sanders for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination ["Sanders for President," March 30]. He espouses programs that Congress will not support and has a record of iconoclastic behavior and failure to work effectively with colleagues. At a time when the United States needs a bridge builder and an adept compromiser, Sanders would be just as divisive as Donald Trump.

Moreover, Sanders's socialist moniker would almost certainly cost him the election, thus handing another four years to Trump. Along the way, the Democratic Party would likely lose many congressional seats to the Republicans.

I urge *The Nation* to withdraw this endorsement.

Glenn G. Slocum
washington

Elizabeth Warren had a path to the White House, and I am disappointed *The Nation* joined a number of media outlets in discounting her. As a friend of a friend (a man!) said, "For fuck's sake, it's way past time for a woman to get elected!"

Susan Eleuterio
highland, ind.

As a loyal *Nation* reader for more decades than I care to admit, I was struck by the contrast between the editorial endorsement of Bernie Sanders, with its eloquent description of the world the writers would like to live in, and Joan Walsh's cogent (and accurate) account of the one we actually inhabit ["Black Voters Matter," March 30]. I share Walsh's sadness about the demise of Warren's campaign and weep for the continued starring role of misogyny in our politics.

David P. Balamuth
bryn mawr, pa.

💬 I am pleased that *The Nation* has endorsed Sanders. He is the best presidential candidate in my lifetime (73 years). He has transformed and revitalized progressive politics in his two campaigns. A Sanders-Warren ticket would be outstanding.

CR Lawn

💬 A forceful and worthy endorsement. On the nose. The choice between Sanders and Joe Biden is clear: Biden represents the middle road on climate change, little to no enthusiasm on Medicare for All, silence on a wealth tax and a tax on Wall Street transactions, a continuation of the military-industrial complex and interventionist policies, and resistance to criminal justice reform and the legalization of marijuana.

Sanders, in my opinion, is still relatively unknown to some voters. And in this election the Democratic National Committee, establishment lawmakers, and yes, even some unions have to decide whether they stand with the 1 percent and corporations or with workers, the middle class, and the poor. Do they support a New Deal for the people and the planet?

The Nation's endorsement sends a clear message that the establishment can push the nation and the world forward or choose to hold it back.

Alan Quellmalz

💬 Proud of *The Nation*! We have to close ranks and strengthen the progressive camp.

Pablo Sadler

💬 Thank you for this endorsement. I am still committed to Warren but will have no problem voting for Bernie, should he win the nomination. I, too, think a Sanders-Warren ticket would be a winner.

Ruth Kay

Bye-Bye Bloomberg

💬 Re Ken Klippenstein's article "This Was a Grift" [March 30]: Bloomberg's theme song should have been "Can't Buy Me Love."

Bruce Kalter

💬 Comments drawn from our website
letters@thenation.com

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A Bigger Bailout

As US deaths from the coronavirus soared past 2,000 and skyrocketing unemployment claims crashed state websites, Congress passed the largest economic emergency package in history. Though absolutely necessary, the legislation is also, as Republican Senator Ben Sasse, inspired by his Vermont colleague Bernie Sanders, put it, "a big crap sandwich." Billed as a $2 trillion package, it will actually shovel some $6 trillion toward countering the economic collapse—and that still won't be enough.

It could have been worse. Senate Democrats strengthened unemployment insurance for laid-off workers, covering more of them for longer and adding $600 a week to current state levels. They also targeted funds for hospitals and medical supplies—bizarrely absent from the Republican draft—and increased aid to schools, states, and localities.

But don't be fooled. Beyond these appetizers lies a banquet for corporate predators. The bill provides $500 billion as a backstop for the Federal Reserve to pump trillions of dollars into banks and corporations. With that, the latter will pocket over 80 percent of the total package, while workers and families will get about 8 percent. States, localities, hospitals, and schools will be left with even less.

Democrats revolted against giving Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin total discretion over the package, creating a special inspector general and an oversight committee (which President Trump later said he'd ignore). Progressives had hoped to use this crisis to impose sensible conditions on corporations. Some weak restrictions on executive pay and layoffs survived, along with token forgiveness of interest on student loans and some mortgage protections. But the provisions for a public equity stake in bailed-out companies came with Mnuchin's authority to waive them.

Corporate predators, however, got a pass. The Fed will flood banks with money—which corporations can then use to finance mergers, take over distressed rivals, and lard up on debt. Wall Street can use the crisis to increase concentration, not competition, adding to the country's already obscene inequality.

The Democratic majority in the House failed to pass a bold bill that would have forced the Senate's hand. Instead, while Speaker Nancy Pelosi negotiated backstage with Mnuchin, the House waited for Senate Republicans to unveil their version. Eventually the House offered marker legislation—a short bill aimed at staking out a position—too late to have any real impact. Pelosi let Republican senators drive the debate, putting Senate Democrats in the impossible position of delaying help to the American people in order to gain sensible concessions.

But a more aggressive strategy would still have faced formidable obstacles. While the GOP controls the Senate and the White House, Wall Street effectively controls the Fed, which, with its power to create and distribute money, is surely the most powerful institution in a fiscal crisis. The failure of neoliberalism has expanded the alternatives, but market fundamentalism, backed by corporate lobbies, still dominates.

The debate, however, isn't over. As the pandemic and the economic collapse spread, Congress will have to act again. Far greater support for states and localities—all now headed into crippling budget crises—is imperative. Extending paid sick leave and funding voting by mail to secure elections are both vital, as are further payments to individuals and continued protection against foreclosures and evictions. House progressives are already working on these elements for the next legislation. This time, Democrats must force the debate.

The public should get equity in return for aid so taxpayers can benefit from the upside of any rescue. Medicare should cover all coronavirus testing and treatment costs—an obvious step toward Medicare for All. Forgiveness of student loans, provisions for work sharing, and more must be on the table.

Crisis legislation reflects the balance of power. As the crisis deepens, the response must get bolder, making the debate, and the alternatives, clearer.

ROBERT L. BOROSAGE FOR *THE NATION*

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Cover illustration: T.M. Detwiler

MIGRATION IS A HUMAN RIGHT!

BY THE NUMBERS

$0
Amount that undocumented immigrants will receive as part of the Covid-19 emergency stimulus bill

$11.74B
Average amount that undocumented immigrants pay in taxes every year to state and local governments

10.5M
Number of undocumented immigrants in the United States

4.8%
Percentage of the US workforce that is undocumented

66%
Percentage of undocumented adults who have been in the US for more than 10 years

$2T
Amount of the Covid-19 emergency stimulus bill

—Rima Parikh

COMMENT

Homeless Amid Covid

The pandemic shows that housing is health care.

On a recent evening in Portland, Oregon, Dr. William Toepper put on a paper surgical mask and made his way down a muddy road toward a row of shelters pitched beneath the fir trees. Smoke drifted up from a small fire tended by two women. One of them stood as he approached. "You doing OK?" he asked.

"Yeah," she said. "Got any food?"

"We've got survivor kits," Toepper offered, holding out a ziplock bag packed with socks, snacks, antibiotic ointment, and hand sanitizer. "I'll take one," the woman said. "I want to survive."

Toepper, a retired emergency physician, is the medical director of Portland Street Medicine, a group of doctors, nurses, social workers, and other volunteers who provide care to people living on the streets, in camps, or in forests in the Portland area. Volunteers go on rounds three days a week, providing acute care and basic medical supplies and offering to connect people with other services. In the past few weeks PSM volunteers have also been sharing information about Covid-19 as part of a multiorganization effort to protect Portland's homeless population, estimated at 4,000, during the pandemic.

Covid-19 complicates the logistics of providing care but makes it more necessary.

In the field, Toepper goes by "Dr. Bill." He's known this woman, whom I'll call Hannah, for about two years. Hannah is 40, and she has chronic hypertension. She's on medication, and she's feeling better, she told us—"except for all this crap going on," she added, waving her hands. She was wearing blue latex gloves. "I'm just stressed out really bad."

Nearby, a man with a short gray beard poked his head out of a tent. He'd been following news about the coronavirus on his phone. Earlier in the day Oregon's governor issued a stay-home order, closing some businesses and public spaces that many people without housing rely on. "Everything's going to be shut down for two weeks now?" the man asked. "Probably more like six weeks, yeah," Toepper replied.

"How are we supposed to eat?" the man said.

More than half a million people across the United States experience homelessness on any given night, and the population faces acute risks from the respiratory virus. Many have underlying health conditions, including chronic lung disease, HIV/AIDS, and mental illness, as well as higher levels of stress, which can weaken the immune system. Even in the absence of a viral pandemic, people experiencing unsheltered homelessness have a mortality rate almost 10 times the general population's and nearly three times that of people living in shelters. Access to sanitation facilities, limited under ordinary circumstances, has been further complicated as public spaces like libraries close and service providers suspend operations in response to the pandemic.

The first confirmed death from Covid-19 in the US homeless population occurred on March 16 in Silicon Valley; since then, in New York City, at least two others have died, and dozens of people living in shelters have tested positive for the coronavirus. Social distancing is difficult if not impossible in shelter settings, though shelters across the country are taking various measures to try to limit the risk, including opening new temporary facilities to relieve crowding elsewhere. For those living outdoors, survival often depends on social bonds. "It's a social cohort of people," Toepper said, culturally and sometimes economically. "It's tough to distance when your income depends on sex work or canning [collecting cans for the recycling deposit]." He continued, "My sense is that the overall risk of getting [Covid-19] is lower, simply because of the fresh air. But once it hits, it's going to be less well tolerated." And if it hits, "the virus doesn't stay in the homeless encampments. It's a threat to everyone."

Farther down the row of campsites, a woman named Julie asked Toepper about the shelter-in-place rules. "I was wondering if they're possibly going to round us up and put us in camps, and if that's the case, what's going to happen to my dog?" she said. "That is certainly not the plan," he assured her.

Julie asked about the symptoms of the disease, and Brandon Deyo, a registered nurse and PSM volunteer, told her to watch out for cough, fever, and shortness of breath. "The hard part is that hospitals are really busy right now because of this, and there are sick people there, so there are risks," he said. "But if you're struggling to breathe, then you should go."

Earlier, Toepper asked Hannah what her anxiety felt like. He described his own as like a pit in his stomach. "Oh, man," she said, "it goes right to my heart."

One of the foundational principles of street medicine is that providers meet people wherever they are. Offering regular care directly can avert unnecessary, expensive trips to the emergency room. It also helps build trust with people who might never visit a hospital or clinic, even if they're critically ill or injured. "When somebody comes into a health care setting, if they're not clean or they don't communicate well or they can't bring their service dog, it can result in quite traumatic experiences, so they avoid it," Toepper said. "Our experience on the streets is that people are underutilizing health care."

Over the past few weeks, Toepper has been grappling with a question that's both logistical and ethical: How best to provide street medicine, which depends on personal contact, during a viral pandemic? "The difficult thing about doing the work is that contamination measures, distancing, PPE [personal protective equipment]—it's a little more difficult in some of these chaotic environments," he said. Some of PSM's outreach has been scaled back simply because many of its volunteers work in hospitals and are busier than ever because of the virus. "One of us is probably going to get Covid, and I don't know how that's going to affect us, to be honest," he said. That prospect amplifies the need to protect not only PSM's volunteers but also the people they treat.

Several dozen street medicine programs operate in the US. Recently the Street Medicine Institute, which advises local community groups, released recommendations that outreach teams be limited to essential personnel and that they focus on reducing the "spread of the pandemic, while still providing the best medical care possible to the rough sleeping population." In Portland, Toepper implemented new protocols for distributing medications and supplies to people, and he and Deyo wore masks.

While Covid-19 complicates the logistics of providing care, the pandemic also makes the work more necessary. In addition to reaching an at-risk population, street medicine can play an important role in public health more broadly. "So much of this work, on a practical level, has always been ER diversion," Deyo said. That mission "is much more amplified in its importance now," given the need to focus hospital resources on treating Covid-19.

Beginning on March 11, PSM worked alongside the Multnomah County Department of Public Health and others in an effort to reach as much of the city's unhoused population as possible with information about Covid-19 and supplies, including hand sanitizer. At first, Toepper said, many of the people they spoke with seemed uninterested or suspicious, but over the course of a week, they became increasingly concerned. Like Julie, many were afraid of being swept up and imprisoned in shelterlike environments.

Advocates argue that Covid-19 should not be used to forcibly move people into shelters. Instead, they're calling for cities to house people in hotels or other private accommodations during the crisis, and they call for significant increases in funding for housing assistance. "It has never been more clear that housing is health care," said Diane Yentel, the president and CEO of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, in a statement. Advocates worry not only that the pandemic poses risks to individuals without housing but also that the economic fallout could push others into homelessness. The relief package passed by Congress addressed some of these concerns, providing $4 billion to assist homeless shelters and outreach workers, $1.25 billion for Section 8 housing vouchers, $685 million for public housing, and a limited eviction moratorium. (Governors in Oregon, California, and other states have implemented broader moratoriums on residential evictions.)

In response to the pandemic, Portland, along with other cities, decided to limit its regular sweeps of encampments, in accordance with new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which advised that clearing camps could "cause people to disperse throughout the community and break connections with service providers." This will be a reprieve for many people living outdoors in Portland, which, like so many other cities, has been embroiled in contentious debates about housing affordability and the encampments. "The ask from the people living outside is, 'If we could just stay put for a little while, we'd be better able to clean up, we'd do better, we would have less impact on our city,'" Toepper said. After some initial confusion about whether and how Oregon's stay-home order affected people without housing, Governor Kate Brown recently clarified that her directive is "not intended to serve as an enforcement mechanism against Oregon's unsheltered population."

Later in the evening, Toepper pulled up to a street in Southeast Portland where several tents were set up. He and Deyo went from tent to tent, calling out, "Portland Street Medicine! You guys doing OK? Anybody need any medical attention?" They were greeted by silence. "It's eerie," said Toepper.

They approached a beige RV. A small dog leaped against its windows, barking. The woman who came to the door introduced herself as Dee. She described a long list of past and present health problems, including cancer, multiple sclerosis, and fibromyalgia. Deyo asked if she'd been following the news about Covid-19. She said no; she didn't have Internet access. She'd heard that there was a virus going around but didn't know the symptoms. "It sounds like you might be pretty high risk," Deyo told her. When he explained that she should watch out for fever, coughing, and shortness of breath, she cut in: "You're talking about my life."

Throughout the evening, Toepper and Deyo passed out water, the assembled survival packs, and simple medications, depending on what people said they needed—Motrin, antacids, sterile saline for a man who'd split his finger open and had been told he'd need surgery. With many hospitals postponing nonessential procedures because of the pandemic, it wasn't clear when that could happen.

The next day, Toepper called me. He wanted to underscore the fundamental point of street medicine. It is, of course, to treat medical ailments, he said. "But to explain the work by the minuscule, tiny tasks you see doesn't really capture it." Think about the microbiome, he suggested—the bacteria, viruses, and other microorganisms "that keep us alive and sometimes kill us, but mostly keep us alive." Our microbiomes aren't ours alone; they're shaped by our environment and who we come in contact with. So are the nonbiological things that make us who we are, he continued. The pandemic illustrates this interdependence in a particularly stark way. "You can't keep a community healthy if you don't keep the least-healthy in mind and cared for," said Toepper. "We are not all living alone, you know?" ZOË CARPENTER

IN MEMORIAM

Michael Sorkin, 1948–2020

Michael Sorkin died from the coronavirus in an overcrowded hospital on March 26, and it is a shattering loss. If some people consider me an urban theorist, it's only because in 1992 Michael conscripted me to write a chapter in the collection *Variations on a Theme Park*. His ideas have had an immense influence in shaping my own. He was by any measure the most important radical theorist of city life and architecture in the past half century. New Yorkers old enough to have been readers of *The Village Voice* in the 1980s, when he was the paper's architecture critic, will never forget the war he waged against mega-developers and urban rapists like Donald Trump. Or how, in Whitmanesque prose, he weekly sang the ballad of New York's unruly democratic streets. At a time when postmodernists were throwing dirt over the corpse of the 20th century, Michael was resurrecting the socialist dreams and libertarian utopias that were the original soul of architectural modernism. When the people's city was under attack, he was inevitably the first to march to the sound of the guns. And then... his kindness, his devilish glee, his soaring imagination, his 50,000 volts of creative energy—I'm drowning my keyboard in tears. Michael, you rat, why did you go when we need you most?

—Mike Davis,
author and *Nation*
contributing editor

Michael Sorkin was The Nation's *architecture critic from 2013 to 2020.*

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Q&A THOMAS PIKETTY

Thomas Piketty's 2013 book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* created an academic frenzy. It did so by offering a specific explanation for growing inequality, supported by an incredible amount of historical and statistical evidence going back to the 18th century. The rate of return on inherited wealth in an economy, he argued, will always grow faster than the income one earns through compensated labor. Increasing inequality is thus part of the nature of capitalism and can be checked only through state intervention.

Seven years later, Piketty has returned with an even bigger and more ambitious book, *Capital and Ideology*, which argues that inequality is rooted in ideology. He says that inequality is not natural and that it can be confronted and reshaped through sociopolitical mobilization. The book moves beyond the narrow geographic focus of his previous book and offers a global history of how different political systems justify inequality. He puts forward policy proposals, such as power sharing in firms, a progressive wealth tax, a temporary ownership plan, and various other solutions for making Western societies more democratic.

—Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins

DSJ: The blockbuster success of *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* clearly caught you off guard. Now you have written *Capital and Ideology*. Did you feel pressure to make this book live up to the expectations set by the previous work?

TP: I believe this book is much richer and much more interesting than the previous one. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* has many limitations. It is far too Western-centered. In addition, it tends to treat ideology and political attitudes toward equality and inequality as a kind of black box. In *Capital and Ideology*, I try to address these two limitations by taking a more global perspective on the evolution of inequality structures—in India, Brazil, South Africa, China, Russia, etc.—and devoting attention to colonial societies and the modern legacies of slavery and colonialism. I also focus on the history of the different systems for the justification of inequality.

By looking at a broader range of historical experiences and trajectories, a strong conclusion emerges. The determinants of inequality are primarily political and ideological rather than merely economic, technological, or cultural. Throughout history, I find, sociopolitical mobilizations can reshape the organization of societies and inequality structures much faster than what most contemporary observers tend to imagine. In particular, elites often tend to naturalize inequality—i.e., to present the currently existing structure and level of inequality as natural and permanent. But this is not at all what we observe in history.

JOEL SAGET / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

DSJ: You don't like the term "populism." Why is that?

TP: The problem is that the term is used to refer to completely different things. Some people use it to refer to both [Donald] Trump and [Bernie] Sanders in the US or to [Jair] Bolsonaro and [Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva] in Brazil or to [Marine] Le Pen and [Jean-Luc] Mélenchon in France. Very often, it is used as a convenient rhetorical device by people who claim to be in the center—but in practice are often extremist neoliberals—to disqualify anyone who disagrees with them and who manages to attract lower-class socioeconomic voters a bit more than they do, which is not setting the bar very high. When I talk about Trump and Sanders, Bolsonaro and Lula, Le Pen and Mélenchon, I prefer to talk about nationalism versus socialism. The purpose of my historical inquiry is to try to give more precise content to these ideas and to analyze how they evolve over time and around us. But the point is that "nationalism" and "socialism" appear to be more useful terms than "populism."

DSJ: You suggest in the book that the left has become dominated by a Brahmin educated elite that defends cultural diversity. Its main rival, you state, has been a merchant right that defends the free market. You argue that having experienced neither the elite education of the Brahmin left nor the prosperity of the merchant right, those excluded turn to nativist parties. To what extent do you

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Each issue is also made available at TheNation.com.

think the Brahmin left and the merchant right might form a coalition or party to confront the new nationalist movements?

TP: The Brahmin left may not offer much in terms of redistribution and social policies, but this is still better than the merchant right, especially given that the latter has become more and more xenophobic over time, as exemplified by Trump. The possibility of a coalition between the most affluent and most internationalist segments of the Brahmin left and the merchant right corresponds to the strategy followed by [Emmanuel] Macron in France. The problem is that this coalition of the elites has limited appeal for lower-class and lower-middle-class voters and may lose the battle against the social-nativist coalition.

The general problem that we face is the following: If we do not open up new perspectives in terms of social progress and economic justice and if the neoliberal centrists keep pretending that there is only one possible economic policy—basically to the benefit of the most affluent—then we run the risk that the political discussion is going to be more and more about identity, which will provide a winning ground for the nationalists and the nativists.

DSJ: You have a lot of ideas for how to overcome the growing appeal of nativism, such as sharing power in firms, a progressive wealth tax, and making the European Union more democratic. What, though, is the place of grassroots politics and social movements in your vision of social change?

TP: Real change always has to come from grassroots politics and social movements. All I am doing in this book is attempting to put into a broad historical and comparative perspective a number of evolutions that have already started to happen. The progressive wealth tax is now being proposed by a number of Democratic candidates in the US, and the German Social Democrats also propose to reintroduce it. Things were different just five or 10 years ago. All across the world, we see social movements demanding more economic justice, and we also see the need to rethink the organization of economic globalization in order to address social and environmental changes.

Of course, it is always possible to go further and faster. In my book, I propose the concepts of participatory socialism and social federalism to describe these transformations and to offer a perspective on them. Participatory socialism rests on two main pillars: educational justice and the permanent circulation of property. In many countries, including France, socially disadvantaged children actually receive smaller educational investments than socially advantaged kids do. The permanent circulation of property requires the inheritance-for-all scheme (so as to rebalance bargaining power in society), more voting rights for workers, and a limitation of the concentration of voting rights for single shareholders in large companies. The basic idea of social federalism is that socioeconomic relations between countries should be subject to binding objectives regarding social, fiscal, and environmental justice. In other words, you cannot have free capital flows and free exchange of goods and services if you do not have a common and verifiable system of social objectives (a minimum wage, labor rights, etc.), fiscal justice (a minimum common taxation of the largest transnational economic actors), and environmental protection (such as verifiable targets for carbon emissions).

It will take time, but I think that in the long run, we'll be moving in this sort of direction for a simple reason. The nationalist and nativist road map that we see today with Trump, [Boris] Johnson, Le Pen, or [Narendra] Modi might gain immediate popularity, but in the long run, it will not solve the social and environmental problems, which are not going to go away.

DSJ: Covid-19 has caught the world off guard, and the coming economic consequences of the pandemic appear to be a global crisis. What must be done to adequately address the situation?

TP: Times of crisis are times when existing conceptions about the economy are being challenged and when new political-ideological trajectories can arise. Covid-19 illustrates the fact that public authorities can choose to regulate economic forces if they so wish. The question is whether we'll be able to act strongly to address global warming or rising inequality. Together with the 2008–12 bank bailout and money creation, the 2020 health crisis will challenge long-standing discourses about laissez-faire and will feed the social demand for other interventions. For now, however, the only issue is survival. We need to do everything we can to avoid a dreadful rise in the number of casualties. ■

SNAPSHOT / PETER VAN AGTMAEL

Doing the Work

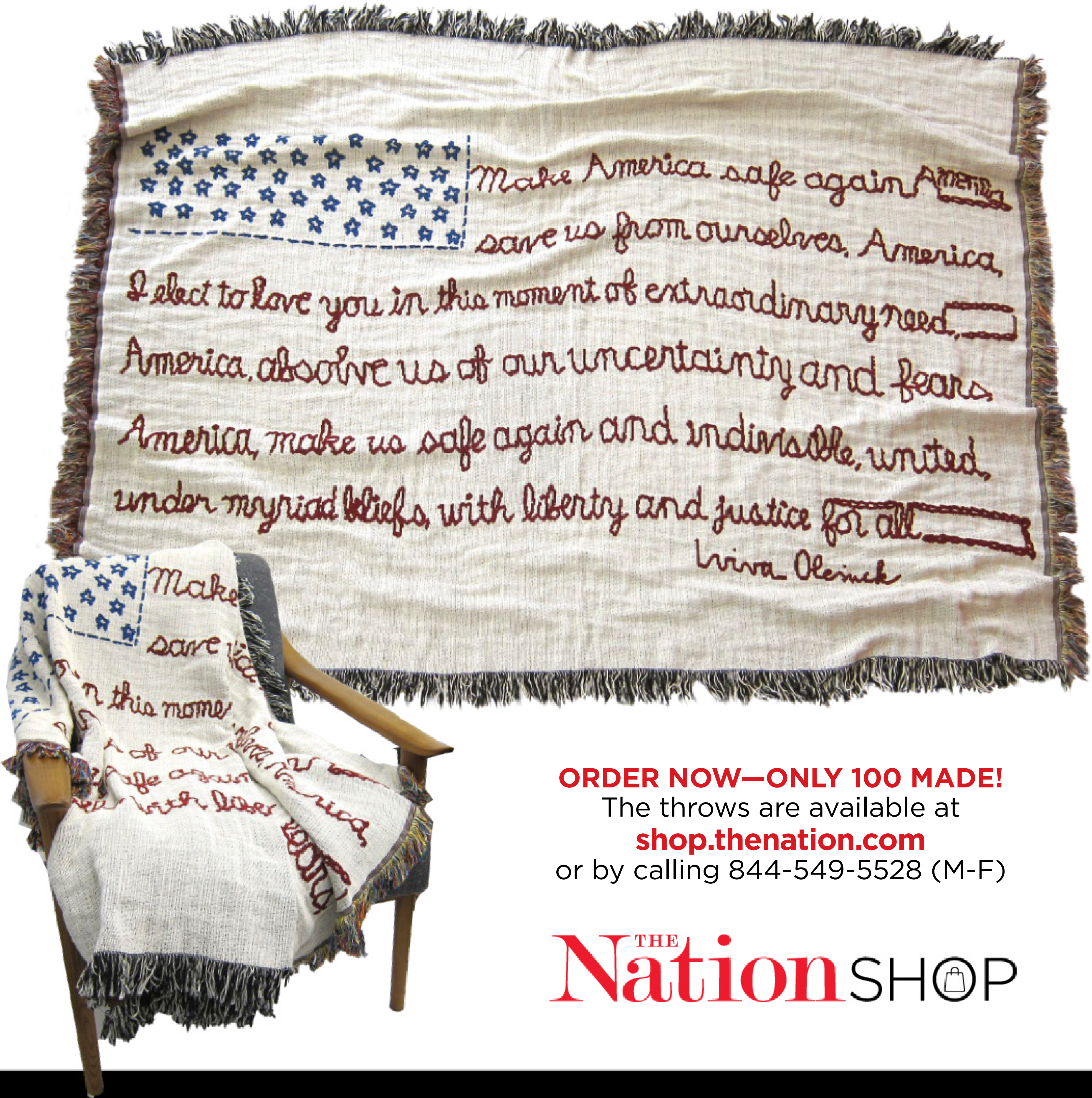
The Nation and Magnum Foundation are partnering to tell the stories of the unsung workforce keeping our economy functioning as the coronavirus spreads across the US and the world. Each week at thenation.com/content/invisible-frontline, we'll focus on the experiences of frontline workers and communities disproportionately affected by the crisis. Peter van Agtmael begins the series with an image he captured recently on the streets of New York City.

MAGNUM FOUNDATION

Incantation for America Tapestry Throw

Own this extremely limited-edition collector's item featuring moving artwork by **Iviva Olenick,** as seen in *The Nation*.

Now exclusively available for *Nation* readers, Olenick's textile piece *Incantation for America* has been transformed into a woven throw perfect for picnics or protests. This gorgeous cotton tapestry was made in the USA and measures 50 by 60 inches.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NATION NEWS

Eric Foner Honored

Eric Foner, a professor emeritus of history at Columbia University and *Nation* editorial board member, received the Anisfield-Wolf lifetime achievement award from the Cleveland Foundation, which for the last 85 years has honored literature that confronts racism and explores diversity. The distinguished list of past recipients includes Nobel Prize winners Martin Luther King Jr., Toni Morrison, and Wole Soyinka.

In granting the award, the jury cited Foner as "among the most important American historians of the past half century." Henry Louis Gates Jr., who directs the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University, noted that the frequent *Nation* contributor "has remade our understanding of the Civil War and especially its aftermath."

Although the lifetime achievement award is well deserved, Foner is by no means finished doing crucial work about America's past and present. In the pages of *The Nation,* Michael Kazin said Foner's recent book *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution* used "rich scholarship to highlight the radicalism of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments." And writing for *The Nation* at end of 2019, Foner reviewed *Equality*, by Charles Postel. In that review, drawing a lesson from American history, he concluded, "The ideal of equality remains as radical as it was in Jefferson's day. But equality limited to some is not equality."

Kali Holloway

The Stars Are Not Like Us

The pandemic highlights the stark differences between the haves and the have-nots.

It was a scene right out of a movie—specifically, a dark comedy about an out-of-touch celebrity in the midst of a pandemic. I'm talking about the gathering of a social media pitchfork mob after billionaire record producer David Geffen posted a photo of his quarantine confines: a sprawling superyacht estimated at some $590 million. "Sunset, last night… isolated in the Grenadines avoiding the virus," he wrote. "I'm hoping everybody is staying safe."

It didn't take long for Geffen's post to earn him a spot on Twitter's trending list, the algorithmic result of the thousands of responses expressing both outrage and ridicule. Presumably surprised by how poorly his missive had been received, Geffen went into digital hiding, quietly setting his account to private before deleting it.

If there was ever a fourth wall dividing celebrities and the rest of us on social media, the coronavirus quarantine has broken it at least temporarily, providing an unvarnished—or at least slightly less mediated—glimpse into the lives of the rich, famous, and bored. Celebrities, left to their own devices, are speaking freely, and the result has been a decidedly mixed bag.

As with Geffen, some celebrities have unwittingly revealed themselves to be gloriously, almost parodically oblivious. Vanessa Hudgens took to Instagram to let fans know that coronavirus deaths are "terrible" but also "like, inevitable?" Jennifer Lopez, quarantined with celebrity paramour and reported presidential adviser Alex Rodriguez, posted an Instagram video of her son riding his hoverboard around the vast, immaculately manicured grounds of her mansion.

Evangeline Lilly said she won't self-quarantine because "some people value freedom over their lives," a decision suggesting she hasn't fully thought through the impact on the lives of others, including her kids and immunocompromised, cancer-stricken father. And Arnold Schwarzenegger offered cautionary words about the importance of social distancing, an off-the-cuff PSA that might have carried a bit more gravitas had he not been pulling on a cigar and sitting in a bubbling jacuzzi.

But a number of celebrities have made seemingly sincere and heartfelt efforts to provide solace. Via Instagram, Lizzo played the flute and offered a "meditation and mantra to promote healing," Chris Martin and John Legend gave intimate concerts, and the Dropkick Murphys—unable to play their annual St. Patrick's Day concert in Boston for the first time since 1996—gave a free live performance.

But others have made woeful miscalculations. There was the schlock heard round the world from Gal Gadot and a chorus of her celebrity friends with their treacly rendition of John Lennon's "Imagine." What was surely meant as a unifying moment came off as vacuous self-indulgence from celebs attempting to readjust the spotlight the coronavirus had stolen from them. The scene was made more cringeworthy by Gadot's musing that she was "feeling a bit philosophical" after a few days of being trapped in her mansion. "This virus has affected the entire world. Everyone. It doesn't matter who you are, where you're from. We're all in this together." As she soaked in a bathtub full of rose-petal-strewn water, Madonna expressed a similar sentiment. "What's wonderful" about Covid-19, the pop star said, "is that it's made us all equal in many ways."

That's a nice thought. Unfortunately, it's not true. The backlash to this star-studded navel-gazing has come as the coronavirus brings into stark relief the inequities in our health care system. Our headlines now include daily announcements from celebrities—Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson, Idris Elba, and multiple players on NBA teams—about their Covid-19 status. In the meantime, the rest of us await news of when we'll even have access to those tests.

We now get daily announcements from celebrities about their Covid-19 status as testing remains inaccessible to most of us.

Wealthy politicians like Rand Paul, the first US senator to test positive for the virus, have also figured into the rich-versus-the-rest-of-us divide. He repeatedly noted he was asymptomatic when tested, while others who were visibly sick have been refused testing, with sometimes fatal results. A recent Reuters report documented this disparity. "At least 100 executives and other New Yorkers of means had easy access to testing," it stated. "These people paid a $5,000-a-year membership fee for a medical concierge service in New York City." *The New York*

Times noted that stars are "used to receiving preferential treatment at Los Angeles medical centers" and that "many A-listers use LifeSpan, a private practice." Another firm, Private Health Management, has six-month plans available to those who can afford the $80,000 price. These services are far out of reach for most of us, especially the 100 million Americans who cannot work from home because they hold jobs in manufacturing, service, delivery, and the gig economy.

What's been refreshing amid the high visibility of the chasm between the haves and have-nots is those celebs who have spoken directly to this disparity. Britney Spears, who—let's be real—none of us took for a *Marx-Engels Reader* type, shared an Instagram message from Brooklyn artist Mimi Zhu calling for wealth redistribution, complete with a three rose emoji sign-off. (Three days earlier, Spears invited fans struggling with finances to "DM me and I will help you out.") Fran Drescher retweeted a call for a general strike, adding, "Capitalism has become another word for Ruling Class Elite! When profit is at the expence [sic] of all things of true value, we gotta problem."

And then there was Cardi B, who chastised fellow celebrities who "have the luxury to pay $30-$40,000…to get tested and get treated" and demanded that the government pay for testing because the current pandemic could have been "prevented when they found out about this." The rapper lamented, "The general public—people that work regular jobs, people that get regular paychecks, the middle class, the poor…they're not getting treated like…celebrities."

Judging from the responses, it was a pitch-perfect pronouncement. Particularly in a moment when many celebrities keep getting this, literally and figuratively, off-key. ■

Kali Holloway is a journalist who has also written for The Daily Beast, The Guardian, *and other outlets.*

Calvin Trillin
Deadline Poet

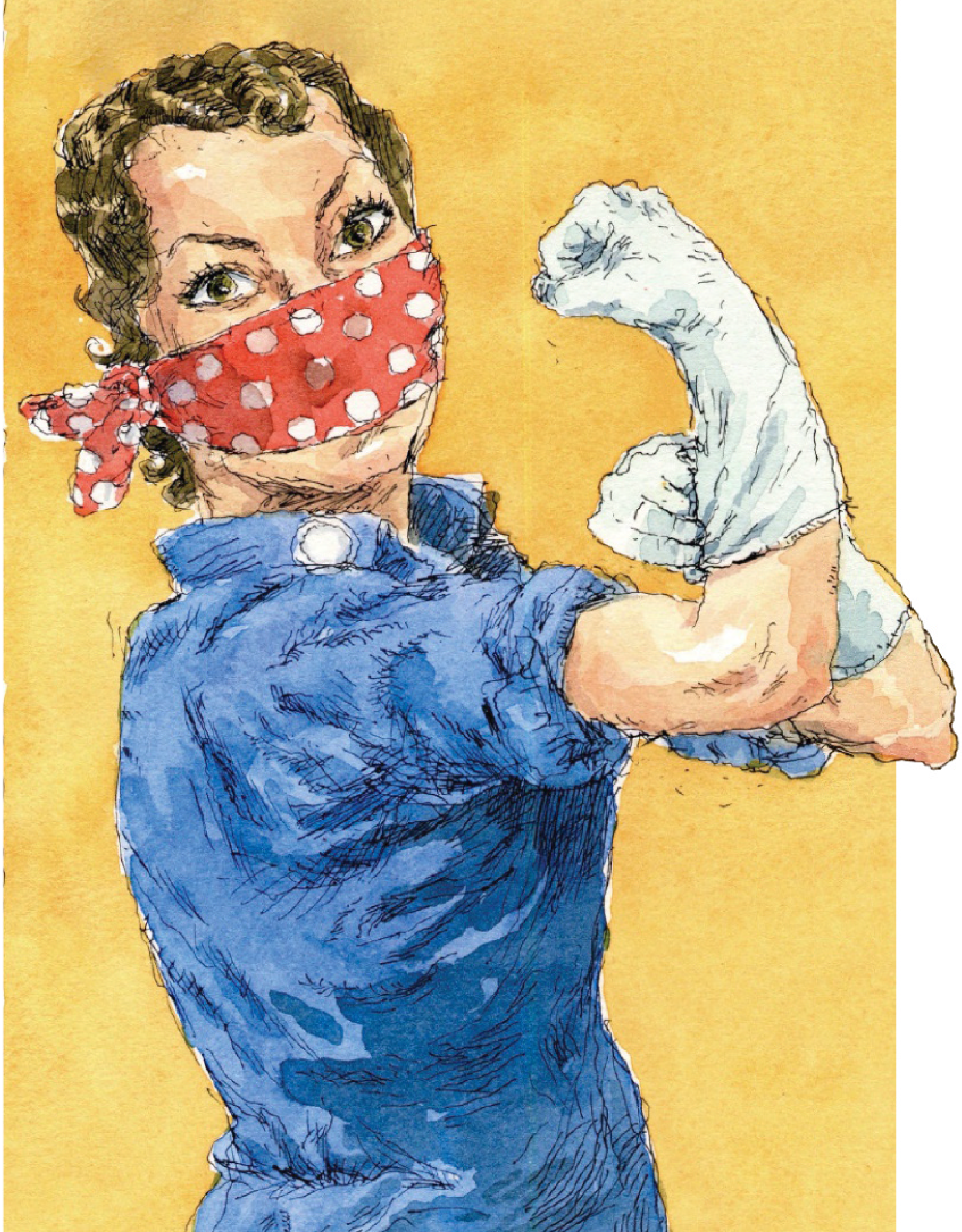
THREE CHEERS

We give three cheers to Dr. Fauci.
Quite old but hardly on the couch, he
Confirmed that Fauci's still no slouch. He
Just gave the facts. That made Trump grouchy.
So three cheers more for Dr. Fauci.

ILLUSTRATING THE NATION

We Can Do It!

ILLUSTRATION BY **JOHN CUNEO**



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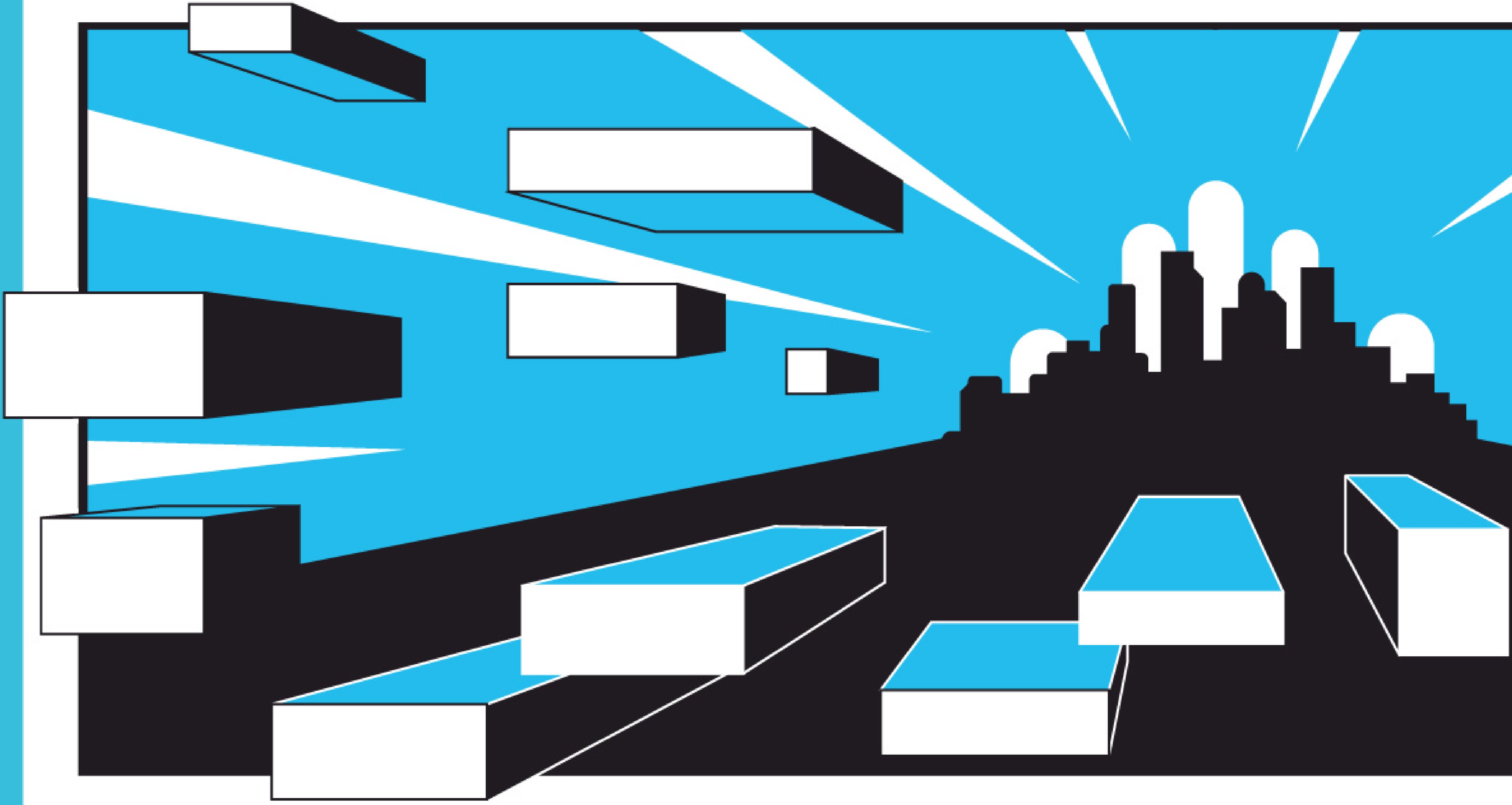


#1 A BEST CASE SCENARIO

Now is the time to imagine a different world.

ATOSSA ARAXIA ABRAHAMIAN

THE VIRUS MADE ITSELF KNOWN IN THE Chinese city of Wuhan in December in the form of a respiratory illness not unlike pneumonia. At first, no one knew quite where the disease had come from, but it seemed to touch workers at a wet market where exotic live animals were sold. Before long, a 61-year-old man with existing health conditions died. He'd been a regular at the market, so they blamed the bats, then the pangolins, then the shoppers who procured these delicacies, and finally, just China. Within weeks, the region was on lockdown, and flights had been canceled. But it was too late for containment. The virus had taken up residence in lungs and on fingertips, clothing, and cardboard. It traveled far and wide—to South Korea and Thailand, to Seattle and London.

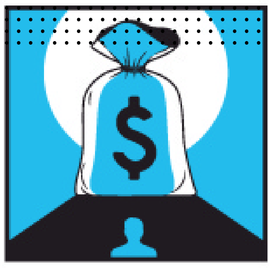
> Phone calls went unscreened and were even answered.

One case was detected in the prophetically named French ski town of Les Contamines; a large outbreak occurred in Milan before spreading thick and fast through northern Italy. Hospital wards filled up. People in panic shopped for hand sanitizer and, bafflingly, toilet paper. On January 30, the World Health Organization declared the virus a public health emergency; six weeks later, it deemed the crisis a full-blown pandemic.

As winter gave way to spring, the virus crept into schools, cafés, subway cars, and nursing homes. Uni-

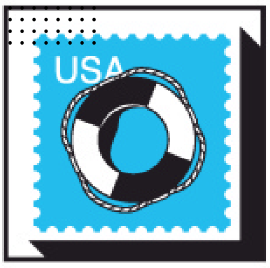
ILLUSTRATION BY T.M. DETWILER

IS CRISIS



#2 Whatever It Takes

#3 The Mobilization We Need Now



#4 How to Save the Postal Service

#5 Solidarity Amid the Solitude

Central banks enacted radical measures to stimulate the economy. There were no interest rates left to cut, so lending turned into giving.

versities closed dorms and moved to conduct classes online. Remote work protocols were adopted. Service work dried up, dealing cab drivers and waiters and aestheticians an economic blow. Children were told to stay home from school; parents were not told what to do with them. But we are social creatures, unfit for long periods of solitude. When large gatherings were shut down, phone calls went unscreened and were even answered. People checked in. People cared.

As the plague spread, the human cost was staggering. Tens of thousands died. Millions more were sickened. It hit the elderly the hardest, as well as those with underlying conditions. The funeral industry boomed, as did the appeal of apocalyptic cults and slickly branded startup religions. Fortunately, children were mostly spared as victims of the virus, and communities came together to make sure they kept up with their schoolwork in the absence of classrooms, courses, and teachers.

Facing anger, outrage, and grief from their citizens, governments realized that those who could not do their jobs remotely—not to mention those whose work had dried up—would be destitute if they did not receive significant aid. So that's what workers received: help, in the form of cash, food, and services. Means testing went out the window. Work requirements became a joke. Debt payments and water bills and evictions were suspended, then canceled. Central banks enacted radical measures to stimulate the economy. There were no interest rates left to cut, so lending turned into giving.

No one asked where all the money was coming from, because everyone understood that this was where it had always come from. Some national states actually ended up saving money—the happy result of all wars being put on hold, thanks to a unanimous resolution from the UN Security Council. Iran reached a détente with Israel after medical researchers banded together to develop a treatment that saved the lives of millions, including former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The treatment prevented him from infecting his cellmates in his supermax prison; he ended up succumbing to a stroke. All but a tiny number of inmates in the United States were released. State funerals for politicians who said they could pray their way out of becoming sick were broadcast online but attended by no one.

Military contractors started churning out medical supplies, troops mobilized to build homes and hospitals, and unemployed workers pledged to build small-scale local green infrastructure. Austerity became a distant nightmare of the past. With the airline industry in shambles and industrial activity at a virtual standstill, carbon emissions dropped dramatically. Demand for oil dried up, too. Endangered species, unaffected by the virus, began to proliferate. Bats were studied and revered for their immunity to this virus and many others. Pangolins were never seen at the dinner table again.

Because of stringent precautionary measures and warmer temperatures, the virus did not hit African states as hard as Western ones—a small mercy that nonetheless

WE SHALL
OVERCOME
CAPITALISM

Optimism of the wall: Graffiti near the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, Germany, assures us that we will come together to build a new society.

DANIEL ROLAND / STRINGER VIA GETTY IMAGES

pushed countries there to establish a continental health care system, with the help of the World Health Organization and grants from the World Trade Organization, which changed its mission statement entirely. Instead of lending to economically ailing nations, it would pool funding and make debt-free development grants, reasoning it was the only way to avoid a market crash. Refugees living in camps—in South America, Lebanon, Greece, and beyond—were rehoused in decent accommodations to cut back on the risk of spreading the infection. They helped with relief efforts, earning them the admiration of locals and helping them integrate into their new homes.

Under the crushing weight of an overburdened health care system, countries began recognizing one another's medical licenses, easing visa restrictions on doctors and nurses from less affected regions to emigrate and offering high-quality health care to everyone, no questions asked. People necessarily crossed fewer borders, but when they did, they were greeted with open arms. In the United States, the Transportation Security Administration stopped banning liquids on flights, beginning with 12-ounce containers of hand sanitizer. Scientists worked around the clock to develop vaccines, and philanthropists poured money into the initiative, even though they would no longer receive tax breaks for their efforts.

As their daily lives were upended, reorganized, and reimagined by the demands of the pandemic and the community, workers around the world adjusted to their new rhythms. In China, where the crisis began, months of lockdown gave way to blue skies and clean breezes. The smog had cleared—a result of massive factory shutdowns. The sun shone brighter. It was easier to breathe. Young people wondered, "Why couldn't the air be so clean every day? Why did we have to choose?" Farmers even found their livestock thriving and their crops growing better—a consequence of cleaner soil and water, as well as regulation by health authorities to prevent immuno-compromisation and animal-borne infections.

Office workers, as the months passed, began to question the way they had been living before the virus. They missed human contact but not their commutes. They wanted to see their colleagues, although they were relieved to shed the artifice of the nine-to-five, the endless meetings, the pretending to be busy at all hours of the day, the sad desk lunches and minute counting. They worked when they needed to and stopped when it was unnecessary. They spent more time with their families and made bad music and bad art.

So many conventions revealed themselves to be hollow in the face of a crisis. Going back to the old ways felt inconceivable.

So many conventions revealed themselves to be hollow in the face of a crisis. Going back to the old ways felt inconceivable.

And so, slowly but surely, all around the world the question stopped being "Why us?" or "Why now?" It became "Why not?" ■

#2 WHATEVER IT TAKES

Even deficit hawks like Joe Biden know we can afford to beat this crisis.

ROHAN GREY

DURING THE DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL primary debate on March 15, Joe Biden was asked how he would respond to the coronavirus pandemic sweeping the world.

His response: “Nobody will pay for anything having to do with the crisis. This is a national emergency. There isn’t a question of whether or not this is something that could be covered by insurance or anything else. We, out of the Treasury, are going to pay for this.”

> “Nobody will pay for anything having to do with the crisis…. There isn’t a question of whether or not this is something that could be covered by insurance.”
>
> —Joe Biden

This was a noticeable rhetorical shift for Biden, who has spent the entire primary season attacking his opponent Bernie Sanders for not adequately explaining how he would pay for his ambitious spending proposals and who only days ago indicated that, as president, he would veto Medicare for All legislation because of concern over the price tag. Indeed, Biden has been a proud deficit hawk his entire career. As a senator, he broke with his party to support a Republican-sponsored balanced budget amendment, and as vice president he spearheaded efforts to achieve a bipartisan deficit reduction deal that included cuts to Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security.

The ease with which Biden switched moral registers from “How can we afford it?” to “How can we afford not to?” underscores an important fact, long forgotten by most politicians and the public: When faced with the genuine prospect of annihilation, the only adequate response is to do whatever it takes to prevent it. For the US government, that means asking not “How will we find the money?” but “How will we find (and mobilize) the necessary real resources?”

The current pandemic rivals only World War II in its sheer scale and scope of disruption. The prevailing monetary policy paradigm, already under strain, is now at a breaking point. In March the Federal Reserve slashed interest rates, revived the long-stigmatized discount window, introduced a swath of new lending facilities, and expanded currency-swap line support to other countries. These actions are unlikely to make much of a dent in the situation. The previously unthinkable—massive, open-ended deficit spending—is now nearly inevitable.

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, the Obama administration allowed millions of people to lose their homes in order to foam the runways for the banking system while the Republicans cynically weaponized deficit and debt hysteria in order to deny the Democrats the political credit of a more successful recovery. This time, by contrast, there is bipartisan support for measures that target workers and families, including debt relief and direct cash assistance. At the same time, prominent progressives, including Sanders and “the Squad,” as well as Republican establishment figures like Mitt Romney and far-right populists like Tom Cotton, have criticized these measures for not going far enough.

That it is even imaginable to speak of a common policy agenda among leftists, moderates, and the extreme right wing, let alone one centered on a government spending spree, speaks to just how devastating an inadequate response to this moment would be for everyone.

However, this crisis underscores another truth that only the left is willing to acknowledge and confront: The coronavirus is a tragedy not because the intense suffering it will cause is so exceptional but because it isn’t.

Every year, millions of people die preventable deaths. That the proximate causes of these deaths—gun violence,

Taking stock: Traders at the New York Stock Exchange on March 20. Since January, markets have tumbled worldwide.

RIGHT: SPENCER PLATT / GETTY IMAGES

Rohan Grey is a doctoral fellow at Cornell Law and president of the Modern Money Network.

domestic abuse, racist policing, inadequate health care, militarized border enforcement, international economic sanctions, war-induced starvation—cannot be directly traced to the particular genomic structure of the coronavirus is of little solace to the victims or their loved ones.

Much of the suffering attributable to this pandemic will come not from people directly contracting the virus but from our collective failure to provide adequate care and support to the elderly, the physically vulnerable, the poor, and people in less fortunate countries during their hour of need. The virus itself may be a novel twist, but the broader story is regrettably all too familiar.

It is tempting to downplay the moment we are in as a temporary emergency. But the reality is that our present situation is much closer to what can be called the new normal than to an exceptional state. We are only now coming to appreciate just how truly interconnected we all are—mentally, thanks to social media, common culture, and the Internet, and physically, thanks to global supply chains, immigration,

Deficit hawk: Biden has changed his tune about public spending.

and of course the environment.

The macrophysics of global heating, like the microbiology of the coronavirus, does not care about our legal borders, economic theories, or political beliefs. Nature is the great leveler, humbling the smallest country and greatest empire alike.

Even Biden knows this, which is why at the March debate he acknowledged that upon entering office in 2009, he and Barack Obama were informed by the Department of Defense that climate change was the single greatest threat to US national security—a point Sanders has been making for years. However, when the moderators pointed out that his climate plan was smaller and cost $14 trillion less than Sanders's, Biden retreated into defensive bluster and nostalgic promises to restore the 2016 Paris Agreement. Gone was the sense of existential urgency and ambition that animated his earlier remarks about the coronavirus.

Such hypocrisy from someone aspiring to the office of president of the United States is morally and practically unacceptable.

#3 THE MOBILIZATION WE NEED NOW

JAMES K. GALBRAITH

With the coronavirus bearing down on our economy, we must deploy all our resources to survive—so that one day we may thrive.

AS COVID-19 TEARS THROUGH AMERICA, employment, production, and the markets have crashed with terrifying force and speed. People may wonder, is this just a shock, a one-time event that will be over if and when the pandemic comes under control?

It is not. On the contrary, a house of cards has fallen. An entire world of illusions, self-deceptions, and sophistries has died. We've come to the end of a very long string.

This crisis has been coming since the glory days of Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek, whose disciples were not only Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, but also Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, the George Bushes and Barack Obama and many lesser figures. It reflects a binational, bipartisan coalition of catastrophe in the Western realm of ideas. Donald Trump and Boris Johnson are consequences, not causes, of this mental failure, and their responses to Covid-19 follow suit.

The delusion is economics as we've known it. Here, two concepts have ruled: self-organization and the veil of money. The first argued for markets, for all of society to be mediated by the forces of supply and demand. Its supposed virtues were competition, flexibility, incentives, efficiency; the reality is a fragile web, woven of thin threads of glass.

What has happened to the economy is not just a shock, a one-time event that will be over when the pandemic comes under control.

James K. Galbraith is the author of The End of Normal: The Great Crisis and the Future of Growth.

Meanwhile the veil of money obscured the financial system. The banks were not part of the models, which said that money and credit had nothing to do with employment or output, but only with prices and inflation. Bankers, traders, and speculators were ostensibly mere messengers—invisible, unimportant, and critically misunderstood.

In this crisis, the most deluded are the worst hit. Europe has dissolved under the force of the emergency. A friend in Rome, locked alone in his apartment, corrected me: Europe never really existed. Like the fiction of a society organized by markets, the mirage of a union managed by finance ministers and central bankers has evaporated. Border controls are back. Emmanuel Macron speaks for France alone, Angela Merkel for Germany and no other place. For critical weeks, no medical help flowed from Germany to Italy, and the response to date remains trivial. The initial response of the European Central Bank—some bond buying—was overshadowed by an inept remark from its president, Christine Lagarde. Only now are the fiscal rules that have strangled Europe finally, perhaps, being relaxed.

In the United Kingdom, a country run by bankers, traders, and debaters from the Oxford Union, an addled government leaned, at first, toward letting the fire burn: Social Darwinism on the scale of the Irish Famine. While the government pissed away time, the fire got out of

TOP: MICHAEL BROCHSTEIN / ECHOES WIRE / BARCROFT MEDIA VIA GETTY IMAGES

In a free society, we are all Spartacus, and in a humane society, all existential threats to someone—anyone—are the coronavirus. Poverty, sickness, the climate crisis, and structural racism are all national emergencies, and all deserve the same commitment: whatever it takes. "Whatever it takes" means fundamentally reforming our monetary and financial systems so we can easily and quickly provide income to everyone when necessary without sacrificing anyone's privacy or civil liberties. It also means transitioning away from fossil fuels and enacting a Green New Deal (undergirded by the right to a well-paid job, so that everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the common cause of caring for people, communities, and the planet) and creating public goods that are available free to everyone.

And yes, "whatever it takes" means embracing the inevitability of a head-on conflict with the interests of concentrated private capital. A few months ago, it would have sounded extreme to propose placing Amazon, Walmart, Netflix, Uber, and American Airlines under public ownership. But today the socially contingent nature of these corporate behemoths—from their financial engine to their workforce to the goods and services they provide—has been laid bare. If luxury brands like Christian Dior and Givenchy can repurpose factories to make hand sanitizer to save lives, surely the same can be done by the companies responsible for essentials such as food, ventilators, and toilet paper. We want clean hands. But we also want bread, roses, and the means to wipe our asses.

In the 1970s, during her struggle to enact a jobs guarantee and complete the unfinished work of the civil rights movement, Coretta Scott King observed that the United States had "never honestly dealt with the question of a peacetime economy." She is still correct. Even now, we are willing to mobilize against the coronavirus because it sufficiently resembles a foreign invader.

But the real enemy, the one we have always been at war against, is the violence and despair of our own selfishness, greed, and timidity. For too long, we have responded to this enemy with appeasement. But appeasement has proved to be a losing strategy, as it always is. The only way we will have any chance of overcoming the challenge of our present moment is by bringing everyone together, emphasizing our common cause, and committing ourselves to building institutions that reflect and reinforce basic notions of universal solidarity. If we do that, there's nothing we can't accomplish. ■

No passengers: American Airlines has begun sending cargo-only flights between the US and Europe.

Supply chains under pressure: Americans are stocking up on groceries, putting extra strain on those workers.

Fighting the shortage: A California sportswear company switched to manufacturing masks.

Delivery economy: With nonessential businesses shuttered, Americans have turned to online shopping.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: TOM PENNINGTON / GETTY IMAGES; RICK BOWMER / AP PHOTO; DIA DIPASUPIL / GETTY IMAGES; MINDY SCHAUER / MEDIANEWS GROUP / *ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER* VIA GETTY IMAGES

hand. But on March 16, a light came on, and the nation reversed course. It may be that over there, the war is now on.

Essential workers: Food delivery workers continued making deliveries in New York City, considered the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak in the US.

Meanwhile, in China the power of the state backed by a seemingly cooperative and committed citizenry has been observed. Say what you will about the means, which included electronic monitoring, social controls, a quarantine of nearly 60 million people, and a harsh decision to sacrifice thousands in Hubei in order to save hundreds of thousands throughout China. War is like that. But China has, so far, apparently, controlled the outbreak and is socially intact; Chinese teams are fanning out around the world to staff hospitals and bring supplies. In South Korea it seems more advanced methods worked even better: There is hope in competence, organization, productive capacity, and short lines of supply. Those societies held together, and their economies will recover.

The Situation in America

AND THE UNITED STATES? AT THE MOMENT, it is breaking apart. Federal officials, with a few exceptions, are predatory, indifferent, or merely stupid. Bailouts, tax cuts, and slush funds have been proposed, alongside cash payments, as "stimulus" (that vile meth metaphor)—as though with enough money, the market will organize itself. It is the same delusion. The few steady hands are those of some governors, many mayors, county judges, and other local officials—in both parties—who are following the guidance of health professionals and shutting things down.

The American economy must convert, in full and at once, to fight the pandemic.

For the population, it is a test of character. The urgent need is to go into survival-first mode and halt the spread of the pandemic. Ordinary Americans are for the most part community-minded, prepared to follow instructions and do right, if others will do likewise. Around me in Austin, Texas, people are sheltering in place. Virtually all public facilities are closed—we're told for several weeks. Everyone knows it could be months. Most remain calm, except for high officials far away, pressed by panicky voices from Wall Street, which are sowing further disasters through false hopes.

As everyone also knows, there has been far too little testing. There are scant reserves of hospital beds or ICU units and far too few masks, gowns, ventilators, and other critical equipment. Global supply chains have been interrupted, and medicines of many types may run short. Hospital care may become unavailable for some time; if there are no beds, there are no beds for any type of care. One of the few advantages to being in America right now is that it is a large country. Many people live in more space and can self-isolate more easily, for a time, so that critical supplies can start to be produced and delivered. This is not a consolation for the poor or for New Yorkers or for those who rely on assistance that they may not be able to get. Nor for those surrounded by people who haven't heard the message.

It is hard to look past the imminent swamping of the health system, but food and medicine are no less basic to survival and social order. We are told there is plenty of food in the country. Can it get to the stores? Yes, for now, but for how long? How long will people be there to stock and sell and protect it? Distribution and security are the weak links in the food chain. The market has given us efficiency and a high living standard in normal times. It has by the very same token not given us resilience, spare capacity, coordination, or leadership. It has, instead, given us fragility. A web of glass. Panic is both the rational response and the enemy. If panic takes control, it will destroy whatever is left.

When the immediate catastrophe passes, how long will it take before normal life resumes? After the Great Crash of 1929, it took four long years—for just the beginning. To take a distant example, when the Soviet Union collapsed, markets were supposed to organize things quickly—that was the point of shock therapy—but they could not. So the successor states passed through six years of hell, of privation and despair. Factories still existed but were idle; fields existed but went unplowed. Things fell apart. The people could not withstand privatization and looting, loss of wages and pensions, rampant inflation, and the opening to foreign supplies. Millions died of stress, violence, alcohol, and suicide. The US today bears no small similarity to the Russia of 1992.

What Must Be Done

THE AMERICAN ECONOMY MUST CONVERT, in full and at once, to fight the pandemic. The big bailout did not fix the medical supply chain; a public corporation—the Health Finance Corporation, based on the Reconstruction Finance Corporation created during the Great Depression and run by professionals with the power to borrow, allocate, and meet problems as they arise—is needed now. The National Guard and the Army and all their resources must be deployed. The Federal Reserve can backstop state and local governments. And every necessary resource must be enlisted.

The immediate medical need is supplies, beds, personnel. If hospitals can't be built in days—as the Chinese did in Wuhan—then space can be requisitioned. Hotels and dormitories are empty. In extremis, even tents will do; Cuban medical teams have them up and running in Italy right now. The Defense Production Act gives the president the authority to command companies to make masks, oxygen tanks, respirators. People will be needed to clean and perform other basic functions. It's risky work, and it must be decently paid. But if you pay well and give workers protection and cover their health care—and promise legal status, as we do with soldiers in wartime—people will step up.

The next need is to stabilize priority civilian supplies: food, medicines, cleaners, paper goods. The existing system may hold for a while. The key is to lock it in place, and the key resource is the people already doing the indispensable jobs: drivers, stockers, checkout clerks, cooks and kitchen help, scrubbers, and security guards. They don't need cash to stay home; they need pay and protections to keep them working. Suddenly, all these workers are essential and must now be treated that way. If the necessary goods keep coming in at fair prices, most of us will stay calm and get by. If

WANG YING / XINHUA VIA GETTY IMAGES

we don't, rationing and price controls must come next.

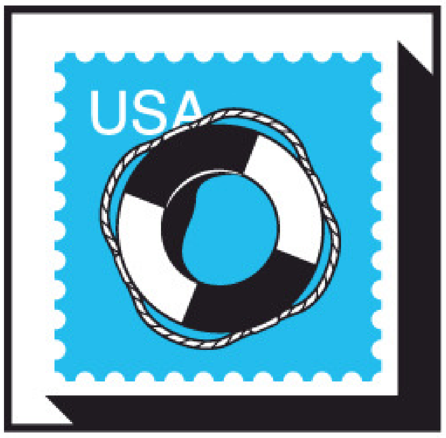
Among the most necessary big corporations right now are those that run mass distribution networks: Amazon, Walmart, FedEx, UPS, and the drugstores and major fast food chains. They should be run as if they were public utilities for the duration. That means giving delivery at cost on essential goods and, as Amazon has done already, stop orders on nonessential items. Those workers also should get raises and health care and unions. In return for staying on the job, they, too, should emerge in an entirely different position after this ends. Overpaid top executives should take a hit, for once, and contribute their time.

Meanwhile, wage workers staying home should be kept on payrolls, at a discount from present wages, as the British and Danes are doing. Banks can finance this at 0 percent, and the government can reimburse the companies at tax time. For the self-employed and gig workers, the fast solution is to make them eligible for unemployment insurance, on similar terms. Evictions and foreclosures and utility stoppages must be halted at once, and utilities restored. Compared with these measures, sending cash to tax filers is slow, meager, inaccurate, and possibly counterproductive, as it may contribute to panic buying and supply-chain disruptions. A new bill to get these measures done is urgently needed.

All the information services should now be drafted, and basic customer bills should be suspended for the duration: cable, cellular, landlines, the Internet. The government can compensate the companies for those costs. Having secure communications and entertainment will help keep people at home. The boost in disposable incomes will help in exact inverse proportion to wealth; those losing work income will benefit most.

Many large, medium, and small employers are down for the count and but for the bailout would be bankrupt soon: airlines, hotel chains, shopping malls, convention centers—more than anyone can list. Whether the gigantic gift just sent to their owners and bondholders will save them is doubtful. With no debt relief so far and future income prospects grim, a vast financial crisis is building for the middle classes and the working poor. Their anxiety will only grow, starting now, unless the next round of legislation moves to relieve it. Otherwise, the health crisis and economic shutdown will give way, eventually, to an even greater social upheaval.

Through it all, the people must be reassured. Those at home must be cared for. And those who remain healthy must be given useful work. Solidarity, organization, determination—these are the words for us now. ■



#4 HOW TO SAVE THE POSTAL SERVICE

And rein in pandemic profiteering at the same time.

MIKE DAVIS

ON MARCH 23, DEMOCRATIC HOUSE committee chairs Carolyn Maloney and Gerry Connolly called attention to an increasingly dire emergency. "Based on a number of briefings and warnings this week about a critical falloff in mail across the country, it has become clear that the Postal Service will not survive the summer without immediate help from Congress and the White House," they said in a statement. The Democrats are pushing debt forgiveness and financial aid for this most vital part of our public infrastructure. But there's an additional step that can be taken that doesn't add to the deficit or compete with other priorities: an excess profits tax.

Since we are now in "wartime," according to the White House, it's important to recall some fiscal lessons from previous wars. One month before entering World War I, with the nation already mobilizing for the conflict, President Woodrow Wilson signed an excess profits tax designed to curb war profiteering and raise revenue from the rich. By 1918, corporations were being taxed from 30 to 80 percent of their estimated excess profits. Simultaneously, the maximum income tax rate was hiked to 77 percent, a 1,100 percent increase over the 1916 rate. The government took over the railroads for the duration of the war. At the end of the conflict, the railroad unions fought a heroic battle for their permanent nationalization. Meanwhile, the excess profits tax remained in effect until the inauguration of Warren Harding in 1921.

Besieged: A postal worker soldiers on, despite dangerous conditions and an uncertain future.

BOTTOM: JOHN MINCHILLO / AP PHOTO

The tax, however, had been unevenly and loosely implemented, allowing banks and corporations, especially munitions makers, to disguise profits. In 1934 a special Senate committee headed by North Dakota's Gerald Nye labeled them "merchants of death" and investigated their role in pushing the country into war. (The young Alger Hiss was one of the committee's lawyers.)

That same year, the Vinson-Trammell Act mandated that shipbuilders and aircraft manufacturers selling to the Navy had to agree to limit their profits to 10 percent of the contract price. They were required to return any excess to the Treasury. This law was later extended to other categories of public contracting, and in the summer of 1940 a new excess profits tax granted broad powers to the Army and Navy, limiting profits by fixing fees to 7 percent of estimated costs.

The United States declared economic war on the Axis powers with the passage of the Lend-Lease Act in March 1941. Nine months later, after Pearl Harbor, the series of War Powers Acts passed by Congress preserved the 1940 excess profits tax and its 7 percent limit. In addition, President Franklin Roosevelt struck back against the people he called "economic royalists," signing an executive order in October 1942 that authorized a 100 percent "super-tax" on incomes over $25,000 (about $390,000 today). Although Congress repealed it five months later, it was popular with some sectors of the public.

As the wartime Office of Price Administration gained expertise in estimating production costs and profits, it assumed statutory authority to revisit and renegotiate procurement contracts. Its power to force refunds of excess profits—vigorously opposed by business—enhanced the effectiveness of the 1940 excess profits tax and was consolidated by the Renegotiation Act of 1942.

As the Cold War threatened to turn hot in 1948, a more limited version of the 1943 act was revived and expanded with the outbreak of the Korean War. During the oil crisis at the end of the 1970s, the Democratic majority in Congress renewed the idea of an excess profits tax, but the resulting Crude Oil Windfall Profit Tax Act in 1980 was only a pale imitation of the previous laws.

The coronavirus pandemic has produced a profiteer whose power to exploit the emergency far exceeds that of the steel industry or munitions makers during the past century's world wars. His name is Jeff Bezos. Amazon's business volume and earnings, of course, are growing at an almost incalculable speed, but there's a bigger story: The current crisis is almost certainly an extinction event for tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of small businesses and franchises. This will hugely expand Amazon's domination over retail distribution, especially as home delivery permanently increases its scope. Amazon is becoming the largest monopoly in world history.

Today's progressive Democrats should be at least as bold as Wilson, Roosevelt, and Harry Truman and draft a new excess profits tax bill in the House, with Amazon particularly in mind. Here's a revenue stream that could not only save the Postal Service but rebuild it after years of budget cuts and unfair competition with FedEx and UPS.

Socialists, of course, need to go much further and recognize that Amazon has become an essential infrastructure, along with privately owned power and communications systems. Some progressives like Elizabeth Warren urge trust-busting and forceful regulation. But the Debsian solution is this: Nationalize the infrastructure of the digital age—including Amazon and private delivery services—and operate it as a series of democratically administered public utilities. ■

#5 SOLIDARITY AMID THE SOLITUDE

BEN EHRENREICH

We're struggling with the coronavirus in Spain, but many days I worry more for my family and friends in the United States.

IN BARCELONA, THE DAYS FEEL VERY much the same. They run together. But I remember the day I scrubbed the wall behind the fridge, the day my partner tried on all her nicest clothes, the day a blackbird landed just outside the window and perched there for a while, singing into the empty street below. Saturday, March 21, was sunny, so we went up on the roof and kept a safe but friendly distance from the neighbors we found there. For the last two days it has been raining, and the apartment has felt smaller—especially since Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez announced he would seek a 15-day extension of the 15-day countrywide lockdown that took effect on the morning of March 16. That adds up to 30 days of this, if we are lucky.

The streets outside are silent, but the city, I know, is not calm. Spain's death toll, which has been doubling every three days, has already surpassed China's and, as this goes to press, shows no sign of slowing. Basic supplies like masks and gowns are running out. The hospitals are overloaded, the moderately ill are being transferred to medicalized rooms in otherwise empty hotels, and the army has been deployed to disinfect the airports and turn convention centers into homeless shelters. In Madrid the police are using drones equipped with loudspeakers to order residents out of public parks.

However bad things are in Spain, we can at least feel confident that the government is scrambling to save as many people as it can.

Since the lockdown was announced, I've received a stream of sympathetic texts and messages from friends back home in the States. And yet I don't want to tell them that, as shaky as things feel here, it's them—and all of you, in DC and LA and everywhere in between—that I'm most frightened for. Because however bad things are in Spain, we can at least feel confident that the government is scrambling to save as many people as it can, while your government, which is still my government, has left you on your own, and left my parents, who are old, and my siblings, my nieces, all my friends, their kids, their parents, almost everyone I love.

I've lived in Spain for more than a year now and hadn't traveled since the early fall, when my partner was six months pregnant. A few weeks after our daughter's birth

BOTTOM: ALVARO BARRIENTOS / AP PHOTO; TOP: ALEX BRANDON / AP PHOTO

Disaster upon disaster: Dr. Anthony Fauci (center) can't hide his concern during a March 24 coronavirus briefing.

in January, two days after the World Health Organization gave the illness caused by the new coronavirus its appropriately sci-fi name, I booked a ticket home.

When I landed at the John F. Kennedy Airport in Queens, Donald Trump was still promising that Covid-19 would simply go away without any effort on the part of the government. "It's like a miracle," he had predicted. "It will disappear." At that point, the virus had killed more than 3,000 people and was migrating quickly around the globe. It had just appeared in Colombia and Peru, South Africa and Cameroon. It was in Australia and New Zealand and, thanks to an American tourist, had reached the mountains of Bhutan.

The virus was also in Europe. The day I arrived in the United States, there were 401 cases in Spain and already nearly 4,000 nearby in Italy. You wouldn't have known that, though, from the immigration officer who flipped through my passport a few times and asked me, twice, if I'd been to Iran or China. As I left, I noticed that the airport was spookily empty, save for a few workers standing here and there, their eyes darting anxiously above their face masks.

It didn't occur to me at the time, but JFK was the US in microcosm that eerie afternoon: nervous, lonely, precariously employed people shifting their weight from foot to foot, not knowing what to do or how to protect themselves while their leaders continued to focus on manufactured fears, the authorities absent except for the usual bloated and racist apparatus of exclusion, all its expensive infrastructure useless for such basic goals as survival.

JFK was the US in microcosm that afternoon: nervous, precariously employed people, not knowing how to protect themselves.

Perhaps more unnerving, the country felt calm. The NBA was still playing, and the schools were open, bars and restaurants, too. The toilet paper frenzy had not yet begun. People were still shaking hands. But the buzz of doom was whining at a higher pitch than usual. You couldn't miss it. Every day, the global death count ticked a little higher. In the United States, fatalities were still low. So was the official number of cases. If you'd paid attention, you knew this was not cause for comfort. Without tests, no one knew how bad it was. And if people didn't know, they couldn't begin to respond.

In Spain, they knew. From that Sunday to Monday, the number of cases doubled. Community transmission was confirmed in Madrid and in the Basque country. I called home and learned that Sergio, our upstairs neighbor, had come down with a cough that wouldn't go away. He worked in a restaurant, so the doctors at the public clinic at the bottom of our street told him to go in for a test. In the end, they didn't give him one. His symptoms were mild, and the health authorities were already rationing tests. (They have since restocked.) Instead, they told him to stay home and promised that they would call to check in on him. Without charge, of course. You don't have to pay for medical care here.

By March 9, I was beginning to worry that I wouldn't be able to get home. All of Italy had been locked down, and Spain didn't seem far behind. Madrid had already decided to close its public schools. Every quick FaceTime with my daughter, who in my absence had learned to coo, made me more concerned. If I got sick, I wouldn't be able to travel, and it might be months before things returned to normal, if they ever did. I tried to change my ticket, but the airline wanted the usual exorbitant fees.

I left the States on the night of March 11, not knowing when I would be able to return or what the country would look like when I did. I was sitting at the gate in another empty airport, waiting to board, when I read that Trump had finally acted—not by expanding health coverage or mandating paid sick leave but by closing the borders to what he called the "foreign virus" and to Europeans. Except for the English ones, who could still enter.

(continued on page 26)

Disinfection brigade: Members of Spain's Military Emergency Unit arrive in Bilbao.

LIBERTY
HABITANTS
PHILAD
MDCCLIII

The Pennsylvania Paradox

JEET HEER

Activists are mobilized to win back this swing state. But they're wary of Joe Biden.

FAILED PREDICTIONS CAN SOMETIMES BE MORE ILLUMINATING THAN FACTS. IN FEBRUARY 2016, former Pennsylvania governor Ed Rendell explained why he thought Hillary Clinton would carry the Keystone State, even though Donald Trump seemed to be winning over the blue-collar white voters who, as part of the Obama coalition, had sent a black Democratic candidate to the White House in 2008 and 2012. "For every one of those blue-collar Democrats [Trump] picks up," Rendell told *The New York Times*, "he will lose to Hillary two socially moderate Republicans and independents in suburban Cleveland, suburban Columbus, suburban Cincinnati, suburban Philadelphia, suburban Pittsburgh, places like that."

There, in a neat single sentence, was the philosophy of the Clinton campaign: We can make up our losses among the white working class by appealing to disgruntled Republicans in the suburbs. Much of Clinton's campaign was geared toward those former supporters of Mitt Romney, Obama's challenger in 2012. Hence her praise of Henry Kissinger, the emphasis on her hawkish foreign policy, and on Trump's personal vulgarity.

Clinton's strategy almost worked—and not just because she got more votes than Trump. She actually made significant gains among suburban voters, compared with Barack Obama. The problem was that these gains were offset not just by a loss of support among white working-class voters but also among working-class African Americans, the very mainstay of the Democratic Party. As Matt Karp noted in *Jacobin*, "In Center City's wealthiest neighborhoods, Clinton rode a wave of enthusiasm, adding 25 percent to Obama's vote totals in genteel Society Hill and tony Rittenhouse Square. But in the working-class and mainly black wards of West and North Philadelphia, Democratic turnout fell across the board—in some areas by more than 10 percent."

Arguably, both the success and the failure of Clinton's strategy went together. By making a play for suburban Republicans, Clinton had to downplay traditional populist themes. While Obama attacked Romney in 2012 for his vulture capitalism, Clinton made fun of Trump for not being a real billionaire—a point underscored by giving a genuine plutocrat, former New York City mayor (and former Republican) Michael Bloomberg pride of place at the Democratic National Convention.

Clinton's failure in Pennsylvania continues to haunt the party. Because regaining the lost Rust Belt states is central to any hope of a Democrat winning the White House, Pennsylvania remains a crucial swing state. And the problems Clinton ran into there echo similar failures in the Midwest, notably in Wisconsin and Michigan.

The good news for the Democrats is that this time, Pennsylvania is home to a vigorous activist movement focused on bringing this Trump-supporting state back into the Democratic fold. These activists are often mobilizing in the very areas that proved most fatal to the Clinton campaign: conservative western Pennsylvania, with its many Obama-to-Trump voters, and West Philadelphia, where fewer working-class people of color turned out than in 2012.

One such group is Lancaster Stands Up, which was formed in the wake of Trump's victory and has worked to energize progressives not just in the city of Lancaster, a Democratic hub, but also in the surrounding suburbs and rural areas. Animating the group is an inclusive populism that its members believe can bring back disaffected working-class Democrats across ethnic lines. Other groups, like Reclaim Philadelphia, are hoping to galvanize working-class voters in the state's big cities.

These progressive activists will be crucial to Pennsylvania's politics, both now and in the general election this fall. But the role they'll play is uncertain as they navigate the challenges of the coronavirus outbreak, a deferred primary, and the prospect of former vice president Joe Biden as the party's nominee. The dilemma they face is one that goes beyond Pennsylvania: How do progressives plan for an election under the cloud of a pandemic, an economic meltdown, and a Democratic front-runner who is allergic to left-wing politics?

> **How can progressives plan for an election under the cloud of a pandemic, an economic meltdown, and a front-runner allergic to left-wing politics?**

THE DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY IN PENNSYLVANIA, like American politics at large, is in a strange limbo. Originally scheduled for April 28, the vote has been tentatively rescheduled for June 2 because of the coronavirus emergency.

Biden, a Pennsylvania native with deep family and political roots in the state, remains the strong favorite, polling at above 50 percent. Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders polls at just over half that, around 29 percent.

Scranton's finest: Joe Biden campaigning in Pennsylvania with Hillary Clinton in 2016.

MARK MAKELA / GETTY IMAGES

Still, Sanders is immensely popular among the activists trying to rebuild progressive politics in Pennsylvania, who argue that he can reach voters who might be turned off by Biden, particularly the disaffected Democrats who in 2016 went for Trump, voted third party, or stayed home. Jonathan Smucker, one of the founders of Lancaster Stands Up, notes that when the group held town hall meetings “out in the boonies” where progressive groups had been scarce, they attracted people who said “the only thing they liked about the Democratic Party was Bernie Sanders.”

Sanders, along with the progressive candidates hoping to make inroads in the down-ballot races, has to figure out how to organize in the middle of a pandemic. It’s a fluid and chaotic moment, one in which activists are still getting their sea legs. I listened in on a Zoom meeting of Pennsylvania organizers, and much of the conversation was devoted to sharing personal anxieties about the crisis and discussing ways to combine political activism with local mutual aid efforts.

Activism is often about reaching out to people in person, whether through door-to-door canvassing or marching. How do you do that in the age of social distancing?

Enormous changes: This food pantry in Kingston, Pennsylvania, has become a drive-through during the pandemic.

AIMEE DILGER / *TIMES LEADER* VIA AP

The Sanders campaign has gone fully digital, eschewing door-knocking and having its staff work remotely. It has also leaned into digital messaging, with Sanders giving regular briefings in the form of virtual conferences, and by roping in key surrogates like New York Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

The Biden campaign has also shifted to digital but has had greater difficulty adapting. A virtual town hall on March 13 was bedeviled by technical glitches. As *The Verge* reported, “First, it began over three hours late. Once Biden did start speaking, his staff had to restart his entire speech because there was no audio, fading his campaign logo in and back out again to signify that they were redoing the address. As he started reading off his prepared remarks again, Biden’s audio was suddenly painful to hear and impossible to understand, at least until they replaced whatever mic he was using with a smartphone.” During the question and answer period, Biden walked off camera and had to be guided back into view.

Despite this mishap, Biden, perhaps goaded by the competition from the Sanders campaign, has become more adept at digital campaigning and is now holding regular talks and conference calls with supporters. And when his campaign does ramp up its real-world operations, having its headquarters in Philadelphia will be an advantage for both the primary and the general election.

Rick Krajewski, an activist who has worked with Reclaim Philadelphia, is running to become a state representative for the 188th District in West Philadelphia. Like many in the new progressive movement, he’s critical of the Democratic Party’s establishment. “I want the Democratic Party to actually construct an agenda that includes things that will support people,” he tells me—such things as Medicare for All, raising the minimum wage, investing in public infrastructure, and reinforcing the social safety net. “All of these are things that were the foundation of this party and have eroded over the last generation,” he adds. “Until we bring that back, any effort the party tries will fail.”

“I want the Democratic Party to actually construct an agenda that…will support people…. Until we bring that back, any effort the party tries will fail.”
—Rick Krajewski

In the face of the coronavirus pandemic, Krajewski has retooled his campaign to include a significant mutual aid component. His canvassers don’t just talk to potential voters about their candidate; they also ask about specific needs created by the crisis and, when necessary, help organize efforts to pick up food donations or medicine. “The reality is that the system is going to overlook countless vulnerable people,” he says. “There’s going to be lots of people who might die because no one has figured out what they need.”

Ocasio-Cortez has also talked about the need for mutual aid and even quoted the 19th century anarchist philosopher Pyotr Kropotkin, a theorist of communal self-organization. Beyond the anarchist tradition, Krajewski and Ocasio-Cortez are harking back to the early 20th century tradition of municipal socialism, which flourished in cities like Milwaukee and Reading, Pennsylvania. Although this program was sometimes mocked as sewer socialism, it won the loyalty of many people with its pragmatic approach and its focus on the immediate needs of local citizens.

As Kelly Morton of Reclaim Philadelphia argues, what Krajewski is doing also has parallels on a national level with the Sanders campaign, which is currently forgoing fundraising and asking its supporters to send their money to select charities.

The coronavirus crisis is changing the very way people talk about politics, Morton observes. “We are seeing more people answer the phone, more people staying on the phone longer, more people tie policy to their personal life. There is a moment here to help people understand how politics impacts their personal life,” she says. She notes that voters are more willing to talk about their economic anxieties—about paying the rent, losing their jobs, and being without health care. “The idea that we are only as insured as the least insured among us is something that is starting to become a reality for people.”

If ordinary people are opening up to radical politics, that still leaves a political problem for progressives: Joe Biden is the party’s presumptive nominee. Will the activists who are working so hard to rebuild the left in Pennsylvania really motivate themselves to support a candidate who is himself so hostile to progressive politics?

BIDEN IS AN UNUSUAL FRONT-RUNNER. HE doesn’t draw the biggest crowds or have the largest base of donors. At a time when the Democratic Party is shifting to the left, he often seems annoyed by progressive demands, taking swipes at protesters calling for action on climate change or immigration. He reassured rich donors that “nothing would fundamentally change” if he’s elected.

Eliza Booth: Low-income people "are going to be much harder to convince to vote for Joe Biden."

Jonathan Smucker: "When you are knocking doors for a candidate you're not excited by, it's fucking hard."

Kelly Morton: "That we are only as insured as the least insured among us is…starting to become a reality."

Rick Krajewski: "I want to see the Democratic Party really stick its neck out for the working class."

Lt. Gov. John Fetterman: "We are going to need…to bring progressives into the fold."

This seems the opposite not just of Sanders's political revolution but also Obama's promise of "hope and change."

In Pennsylvania, Biden has the clear support of the state Democratic Party, winning endorsements even from politicians who had initially supported other candidates. Former Philadelphia mayor Michael Nutter backed Bloomberg but has now joined the crowded Biden camp, which also includes Rendell, Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro, state Treasurer Joe Torsella, and most of Pennsylvania's congressional delegation. Representative Conor Lamb and Senator Bob Casey have been notable endorsements because they illustrate Biden's popularity among centrists. This long list speaks to his strength in positioning himself as the candidate who unites tried-and-true Democrats.

Sanders has a much less impressive array of supporters here. But whoever becomes the party's nominee will have to win over not just committed Democrats but also more marginal voters. This remains Biden's weak spot.

John Fetterman, Pennsylvania's lieutenant governor, sounds a cautionary note. "If Biden is our presumptive nominee, we are going to need to conduct an unprecedented outreach to bring progressives into the fold and make them understand they are critical to toppling Donald Trump. This outreach must be significant, sincere, and sustained," he says. "Anyone who underestimates how formidable Donald Trump will be in Pennsylvania," he adds, "does so at their peril. He is popular."

If Fetterman is right, then Biden has his work cut out for him, because many progressive activists in the state are very skeptical of the former vice president. They all assured me they would vote for him personally and campaign on his behalf. But they often added that the people they were trying to mobilize might be resistant.

"My biggest fear is, I don't think Biden can beat Trump," Smucker tells me, although he adds that Biden "might be able to [win] in Pennsylvania because of his history here." But he would face an enthusiasm gap. "The foremost problem is going to be to get volunteers to knock doors for Biden. When you are knocking doors for a candidate you're not excited by, it's fucking hard."

Smucker's colleague Eliza Booth, another founder of Lancaster Stands Up, agrees. She points out that there are people in the suburbs who "vote blue no matter who" and others who are genuinely excited by Biden. But "low-income people that live here in the city, working families, people who are working several jobs—those people are going to be much harder to convince to vote for Joe Biden."

Booth also feels that the haste to wrap up the primaries and the calls for Sanders to leave the race are only likely to discourage voters. Right now, she says, people are "huddled into their corners" as a result of the primaries. "It's hard to see how we all come together or how we can reach out. A lot of people are feeling hurt."

Morton shares her pessimism. "I don't think Biden has the message of hope and the message of change that brought Obama voters out," she says. "His idea of returning to normal is not going to ride with people who have been struggling for way longer than this pandemic. The way he talks about politics and the way he talks about policies is very dismissive of people who are struggling and need more. I think that just deflates voter engagement."

If Biden is the nominee and wants to win the activist left in Pennsylvania, he has to make some major shifts. His choice of a running mate will be important. In recent elections, Democratic presidential candidates have tended to pick conservative or centrist running mates: Al Gore, Joe Lieberman, Tim Kaine, and Biden himself. But as the 2020 presidential nominee and given his weakness among the left, Biden might need to break with this tradition.

"If he chooses Liz Warren over someone like Amy Klobuchar, he would get more progressives," Booth acknowledges. But she adds that policy is also crucial, and Biden will have to reverse his positions on key issues like Medicare for All.

This is a problem that goes beyond Biden. "I want to see the Democratic Party really stick its neck out for the working class," Krajewski says. "Trump and the GOP are using a false narrative, but they are using a narrative that is working. The Democratic Party has not created a counternarrative. It's often because many of them don't want to." ■

Biden's "idea of returning to normal isn't going to ride with people who have been struggling for way longer than this pandemic."
—Kelly Morton

Streets of Clairton: This former steel town, the setting for *The Deer Hunter*, has been hollowed out by decades of neglect.

DWAR
Pat Des
CRAFT W RLD
JUS US
STOP
LIAN ICE

TOP FROM LEFT: LANCASTER STANDS UP (2); RECLAIM PHILADELPHIA; RICK FOR WEST PHILLY; KEITH SRAKOKIC / AP PHOTO; BOTTOM: MICHAEL S. WILLIAMSON / *THE WASHINGTON POST* VIA GETTY IMAGES

(continued from page 21)

SPAIN IS HARDLY A UTOPIA. DESPITE ITS NAME, THE SOCIALIST Workers' Party, now in power, has historically proved comfortable with neoliberal austerity measures when not pressured hard from the left. Twelve years after the last crisis, unemployment is at nearly 14 percent and over 30 percent for the young. The rising cost of housing has pushed two of my friends out of Barcelona since this year began. But as strapped as people are and as precarious as things have become, affordable public education and universal health care are nonetheless a given, if a hard-fought one, as are powerfully rooted collective traditions—not just mass strikes and protests but also varieties of mutual support that have been under methodical assault in the United States for more than half a century. When I attempt to explain to friends such fundamentals of American existence as insulin at $300 a vial, routine homeless sweeps, and school lunch debt, they look at me blankly, as if I were making shit up.

The day I returned, four towns just outside Barcelona were sealed off. Two government ministers had tested positive for the coronavirus, as had half a dozen elected politicians from the far-right party Vox, including its pistol-toting leader, Santiago Abascal. It should have been rush hour, but traffic was sparse, and the taxi driver who took me home complained that he had waited three and a half hours for a fare. The Chinese, he said, created the virus to wage economic warfare against Trump, and European governments were playing along, happy to invigorate their populations by shedding excess elderly. But, the driver advised, if you ate enough lemons and washed your hands, you should be fine. I didn't argue. "*Cuidate*," I told him, and went upstairs to hug my kid.

I didn't get nervous until the next day, March 13, when I went out for groceries and found the streets abandoned and the supermarkets crowded, anxiety humming through the empty spaces on the shelves. I lugged home bags packed with rice and beans, pasta, oil, soap, just in time for the prime minister to declare a state of emergency. Its extraordinary terms—the closure of all nonessential businesses and the confinement of Spain's 47 million residents to their homes, except when buying groceries or other essentials, caring for dependents, going to the doctor, or if necessary, traveling to and from work—would not be revealed in full until the next night, but by then, most people were already voluntarily staying in.

People all over Barcelona were taking to their balconies and leaning out their windows to clap for everyone out there laboring to keep the city alive.

Confirmed cases had jumped nearly 10-fold in less than a week, to more than 6,000. (They have since jumped more than 14-fold.) A city that treasures its public life, where the plazas and the outdoor tables of the bars and cafés stay full even on the coldest winter days, had, under viral siege, turned inward. Traffic had gone silent. With the windows open, we could hear the wind, the birds singing in the trees, dogs barking blocks away.

Under any other circumstances—political unrest, bombings like the ones that killed 193 people in Madrid in March 2004—the emergency order would have been terrifying. Under these, it was unsurprising but nonetheless alarming. I've read my Giorgio Agamben and know from bitter post-9/11 experience that "states of exception" have a way of becoming permanent realities.

In a country that spent much of the last century under military dictatorship, any expanded public role for the army should be cause for anxiety. To the irritation of Catalonia's President Quim Torra, local police have been placed under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior and charged with enforcing the lockdown, issuing 100-euro fines to any people who cannot justify their presence outdoors. I have rarely seen police here stopping anyone who is not Arab, African, or Roma, and see little reason to believe that will change now. Since the lockdown, the only person I have seen them question was a young African man.

And what of the homeless, who have nowhere safe to go? What of sex workers and the migrants who scrape by selling knockoff designer handbags and who already lived in constant fear of the police? What of the millions of people with no savings and no money coming in?

As horrifying as Spain's reality is, there is at least a sense that the government has been taking decisive and reasonably well-coordinated action with the health of the population in mind, not just the profits of a few. On March 15, Sánchez's government announced that all private hospitals would be required to put their resources at the disposal of the national health system and that all private enterprises possessing or capable of producing goods that might be useful in the fight against the virus, from masks and gloves to drugs and diagnostic equipment, had to report their holdings to the authorities. As an American, I still find the very concept of a government putting public good before private profit so unfamiliar as to be almost dizzying.

Sánchez has since pushed a nearly empty Congress of Deputies to pass a 200-billion-euro package that will include guarantees that all workers have the right to stay home to care for their children or other dependents and that no people will have their utilities shut off while the epidemic rages, a moratorium on mortgage payments for those who need it, expanded unemployment payments and social services for the elderly, and direct financial assistance for individual workers and freelancers as well as businesses. Pablo Iglesias, the leader of the leftist Podemos party, and Barcelona's mayor, Ada Colau, have pressed for a moratorium on rent and a freeze on evictions as well, and Podemos has asked for a basic universal income while the crisis lasts.

When Sánchez addressed the nation on the night of March 14 to explain the terms of the emergency order, I was at home, of course. Where else would I be? Just after he finished speaking, we heard a rumbling outside the windows. People all over the city—and, from what I understand, in Madrid and Valencia and all over the country—were taking to their balconies and leaning out their windows to clap, all at once, for the health care workers, truck drivers, trash collectors, supermarket and warehouse workers, everyone out there laboring to keep the city alive while we hunkered safely inside. We huddled on our narrow balcony and clapped along with our neighbors.

Mónica, who lives next door, babbled at the baby from her balcony, and Sarah, Sergio's partner, who was then 38 weeks pregnant and has since given birth to a healthy little girl, poked her head over from above to say she'd drop by in the morning. The applause—and it happened again the next night and the next and has every night since—was a show of gratitude, to be sure, but it was also a way of telling one another that we're still here, alive and, for now, unbeaten. It was only a gesture, but one that displayed much of what we'll need, in this country and in every other one, to get through this epidemic: solidarity, collective strength, care, and unbending, stubborn joy. ■

Ben Ehrenreich is a journalist and novelist living in Barcelona.

Books & the Arts

FROM LEFT: LARRY SUMMERS, CHRISTINA ROMER, TIMOTHY GEITHNER, BARACK OBAMA, BEN BERNANKE, AND SHEILA BAIR AT THE WHITE HOUSE IN 2009 (MANDEL NGAN / GETTY IMAGES)

INTO THE MAW

How Obama-era economics failed us

by RYAN COOPER

When Barack Obama took office, he faced the biggest combination of crisis and opportunity that any incoming president had since Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In 1932 the Great Depression had ravaged the country and was only getting worse. Even as he prepared to move into the White House, a fresh wave of banking panic swept through the nation, and it was clear that if Roosevelt was to save American democracy, he needed to put forward a sweeping set of reforms, which is exactly what he did via two major rounds of policy initiatives in 1933 and 1935.

In 2008, Obama faced a similar crisis: The economy was in free fall, and the financial system was gripped by panic. Unemployment had not yet come anywhere close to Depression levels, but like FDR, Obama had the opportunity—even the mandate—to enact far-reaching reforms. Unfortunately, he did not use this opportunity. Faced with a shattering economic breakdown, Obama and his key advisers largely sought to restore the wobbly precrisis status quo, inaugurating a decade of economic stagnation and dislocation that culminated in the election of Donald Trump.

The story of Obama's missed opportunity to fix the rot in the American economy is frequently noted by the left, but it is also the subject of two recent books written mainly by Obama administration insiders—*A Crisis Wasted: Barack Obama's Defining Decisions*, by Reed Hundt, who worked on Obama's transition team, and *Firefighting: The Financial Crisis and Its Lessons*, by Ben Bernanke, Tim Geithner, and Henry Paulson (the former Gold-

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Ryan Cooper is a national correspondent for The Week.

man Sachs chairman and CEO who served as George W. Bush's treasury secretary). The former is a brutal and devastating indictment of Obama's strategic missteps as he confronted the crisis, while the latter attempts an apologia for the Bush-Obama crisis management strategy that inadvertently confirms Hundt's key points. What both books show is that Obama and his administration burned up most of their political capital rescuing the banks from a crisis caused by their own mistakes, and they offer us a warning about doing the same thing again as we face yet another potentially disastrous recession.

Firefighting
The Financial Crisis and Its Lessons
By Ben S. Bernanke, Timothy F. Geithner, and Henry M. Paulson Jr.
Penguin Books. 240 pp. $16

A Crisis Wasted
Barack Obama's Defining Decisions
By Reed Hundt
RosettaBooks. 400 pp. $27.50

As the winds of financial crisis gathered strength in late 2007, the key question faced by both policymakers and those in the banking industry was what should be done about the supposedly too-big-to-fail firms. Several keystone institutions—the gigantic insurer AIG, the megabank Citigroup, the investment banks Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers, and many of the other big Wall Street players—were heavily invested in mortgage-backed securities that turned out to be stuffed with the financial equivalent of toxic waste, and it was clear that, left to their own fate, they would implode.

Worse, the wholesale funding market—the unregulated "shadow banking" system that provided the daily credit flows on which the whole global financial system depended—was experiencing a kind of bank run, and financiers could no longer get the loans necessary for their daily operations. Savvier firms like Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase had already shorted (or made bets against) the housing market and so were able to defend themselves against a disaster centered there—but if any of the other big players went down, they were all too aware that they would likely go, too. After all, the counterparty for many of those shorts was the now-ailing AIG. If it failed, it would take down Goldman and probably most of the rest of Wall Street as well, since they were all so intertwined. Thus, without some kind of government rescue, the entire financial system would collapse.

Yet even if everyone agreed on the necessity of a rescue, there was much less agreement on the form it should take. This was the question that the economic advisers for both the president and the president-elect were grappling with in the last months of 2008. One option, which Paulson favored, was simply to buy up toxic mortgages in order to get them off the banks' balance sheets. A more compelling option was the one favored by Timothy Geithner, then head of the New York Federal Reserve Bank and soon to be Obama's treasury secretary: He recommended "capital injections," in which the government bought a whole bunch of bank stock—in other words, a partial nationalization—that would help strengthen the banks' balance sheets and thus stabilize the financial system. The banks could then lend against the government's fresh capital and further fortify themselves with more good assets to offset the bad ones.

For those financial companies in dire straits, the government would also have the option to simply buy them outright should their collapse threaten financial stability. The Federal Reserve had broad powers to buy up failing firms by declaring an emergency under Section 13(3) of the Federal Reserve Act. In "unusual and exigent circumstances," the Fed could use its money-creating authority to simply purchase a failing company. Once owned by the government, a problem firm could be prevented from going bankrupt, and there would be time to examine its books and either fix it up or isolate it from the rest of the market and let it collapse.

Paulson opposed Geithner's plan on ideological grounds, saying that it was "socialistic" and "sounded un-American." But as the crisis gathered strength and it became clear that asset purchases would not be enough to save the system, the "socialistic" options won out. In early September, Paulson directed the Treasury Department to take control of the mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac (already partly backed by the state anyway), which were then teetering on the brink of collapse. A worried Bush informed Paulson that "we have to make it clear that what we are doing now is transitory, because otherwise it looks like nationalization." But this caveat never came to pass; to this day, Fannie and Freddie are still owned by the government (and incidentally have turned a steady profit since 2012).

But Paulson refused to do the same thing for Lehman Brothers, which was nearing collapse a couple of weeks later. As Hundt writes, he maneuvered to prevent a Fed rescue and instructed the company to declare bankruptcy, thereby setting the stage for the largest bankruptcy in American history. This instantly caused market panic and put AIG on the brink of failure as well. As the markets tanked, Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke threw caution to the wind, declared a Section 13(3) emergency, and rushed in with an $85 billion loan in return for almost 80 percent of AIG's stock—making good old Uncle Sam the owner of the world's largest insurance company.

Bernanke and Paulson insist that the law allowed the Federal Reserve to rescue AIG but not Lehman: The latter "did not have enough solid collateral the Fed could lend against to keep it afloat in a structure the market would accept, as AIG did with its insurance businesses," they and Geithner explain in *Firefighting*. But this distinction was extremely dubious from the start. "Bush did not question this hair-splitting legalism from two non-lawyers," Hundt dryly notes, while the then-chairman of the House Financial Services Committee, Representative Barney Frank, encouraged Bernanke and Paulson to interpret their powers broadly.

Regardless of whether the government should have purchased Lehman Brothers too, the issue with the bailouts of AIG, Fannie Mae, and Freddie Mac was that they were wildly unpopular—but not because people were worried about the government becoming "socialistic." What infuriated them was the unfairness: AIG blew itself up making stupid bets, and now the government was leaping to its rescue with $85 billion (later increased to $180 billion). And yet the Bush administration did little about the company's executives, who had played such a crucial role in wrecking the American economy in the first place. Meanwhile, the people suffering from their atrocious decisions were not similarly bailed out; they continued to see their jobs disappear, their homes foreclosed on, and their pension funds devastated.

Paulson recognized this growing outrage, and so he turned to the Democratic-controlled Congress for additional powers and money—$700 billion in all—thereby pinning "the tail of responsibility on the Democratic donkey," as Hundt puts it. The bill, to create something called the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), was voted down by Congress the first time, but with Obama's support as president-elect and more oversight and structural controls

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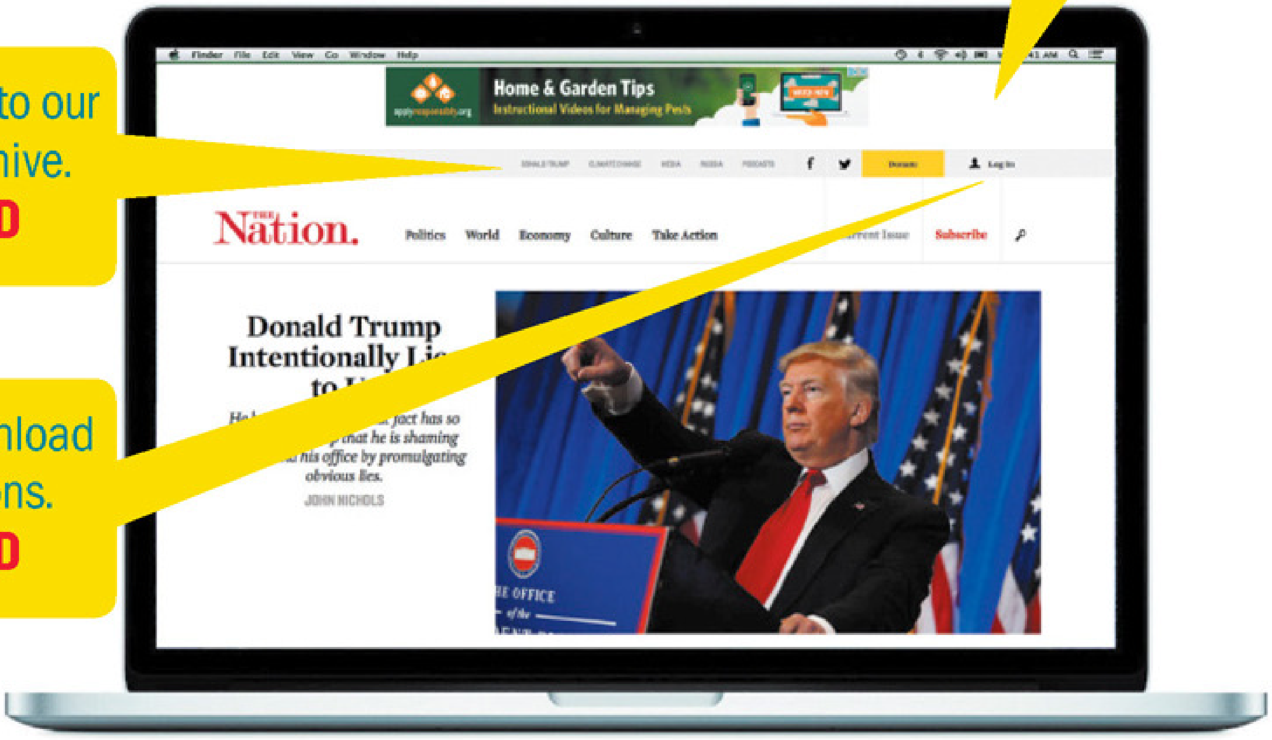

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built into it, TARP passed the House and Senate the second time around, thus making it "the first and most significant decision" of Obama's presidency, Hundt writes: one in which he "let Paulson pick his presidential priority" and "chose bank bailouts—euphemistically, stabilizing finance—as his top strategic goal."

Money now in hand, Paulson set to work. However, he did not even consider the plight of ordinary people, who had suffered terribly as a result of the banking industry's choices. Instead, he offered the banks one of the sweetest deals in the history of American finance. Gathering together the heads of the nine biggest banks, he, Geithner, and Bernanke informed them that they had to accept partial nationalization. But in exchange, their balance sheets would be strengthened with US government cash, and in addition the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) would guarantee their business checking accounts and their debt issued through mid-2009. Everyone present agreed to the terms and divvied up the $125 billion in government capital as Geithner had split it. They may not have had much say in the matter, but the terms they were offered were exceedingly generous. As a shareholder, the government would not exercise its right to vote on the management of their companies, its required dividends were low, and it would seek no changes of management or limits on bonus payments, except for CEOs. In effect, the government was giving the banks an enormous pile of money and asking for almost nothing in return.

In *Firefighting*, Paulson, Bernanke, and Geithner insist that they were simply reacting pragmatically to extraordinarily difficult circumstances. "The only way to contain the economic damage of a financial fire," they argue, "is to put it out, even though it's almost impossible to do that without helping some of the people who caused it." They could not have nationalized the banks outright, they continue, because that would only have led to more panic; even "nationalizing one or two major firms seemed likely to trigger panics that could lead to additional government takeovers," which they wanted to avoid. As far as the three men are concerned, they did what they needed to do to save the financial engines of the American economy—though the rest of that economy remains distinctly unsaved.

Of course, the pragmatic pose that Paulson, Bernanke, and Geithner strike in their book conceals a political agenda and also hides many of the errors they made along the way. The Bush-Obama bailouts reflected a highly political and ideological choice on their part to preserve the financial status quo at any cost—including the enormous share of the country's economic output gobbled up by Wall Street—and to do so while directing incomprehensible amounts of money to the banks instead of to the American people. With the Bush and the Obama administrations' backing, they moved heaven and earth to save the banks, while doing almost nothing to rein in Wall Street or address the crash's devastating effects on employment or mortgage holders. In stark contrast with their radical generosity toward the banks, any steps that either administration took to fix the broader economy were limited and hesitant. Obama's bailout of the Detroit automakers, for instance, included requirements for drastic restructuring, while the economic stimulus provided under the Recovery Act was smaller than the administration's own experts knew was necessary. Obama's advisers rejected ideas for boosting the stimulus's effects, such as creating a government infrastructure bank and gaming the Congressional Budget Office analysis window with time-limited tax cuts.

Perhaps the most egregious malpractice was the administration's supposed effort to assist mortgage holders who had gone underwater on their loans—in reality, a backdoor bank bailout that made the foreclosure crisis worse. The Obama administration not only accepted Paulson's priority of saving Wall Street but also chose to sacrifice those ordinary Americans whose problems were caused by the banks but who now threatened their future stability. The real estate bubble had drastically inflated home prices across the nation, and people who had bought at the top of the market saw their net worth devastated as values fell but their mortgages remained at the same high balances and interest rates. Those mortgages had been packaged into exotic assets traded and owned by Wall Street banks. Somebody was going to have to eat those losses—and Paulson, Bernanke, Geithner, and the Obama economic team were committed to making sure it wasn't the banks.

Once in office, Obama only doubled down on Paulson's agenda, nominating Geithner as his treasury secretary and turning the foreclosure policy over to him. The TARP bill included a sweeping grant of authority and an unspecified appropriation to pursue foreclosure relief—meaning interest rate reductions, payment reschedulings, principal reductions, and "other similar modifications." Obama previously promised to pursue "cramdown," a policy that would have allowed homeowners to write down their mortgage to the home's assessed value during bankruptcy proceedings. But since real homeowner relief would have harmed the banks (by reducing the value of their mortgage assets), Geithner refused to include principal reductions in his foreclosure plan and made the program such a Kafkaesque nightmare that few participated in it. Those who did found themselves at the mercy of mortgage servicers who had direct financial incentives to foreclose, and that is exactly what they did: They proceeded to trick thousands of homeowners into foreclosure. While more and more Americans lost their homes, Geithner quietly and successfully lobbied Congress to stop cramdown altogether. Through it all, Obama did nothing—just as he did nothing when Geithner disobeyed a direct order to draw up plans to wind down Citigroup.

In Hundt's interviews with administration officials, the logic of this choice is discussed explicitly. "The only problem was that there was $750 billion of negative equity in housing—the amount that mortgages exceeded the value of the houses," says Obama economic adviser Austan Goolsbee. "For sure the banks couldn't take $750 billion of losses and for sure the government wasn't willing to give $750 billion in subsidies to underwater homeowners, to say nothing of the anger it would engender among non-underwater homeowners." Christina Romer, the head of Obama's Council of Economic Advisers, puts that figure higher but comes to a similar conclusion. "There was about $1 trillion of negative equity," she tells Hundt, "and getting rid of it would have helped increase consumer spending and heal the economy. But for the government to just absorb it would have been very expensive."

Thus, since the banks couldn't handle these losses and the government was unwilling to do so, the Obama team decided to quietly shove them onto homeowners. This choice would result in about 10 million families being forced out of their homes through foreclosure or some other process—roughly one out of every six homeowners. These foreclosed properties would then become economic time bombs, since abandoned houses damage neighborhoods and the value of adjacent homes. The political side effects were also disastrous. As Hundt writes, "In swing states affected severely by the housing market downturn, the reduction of mortgage credit supply had five times the negative effect on votes for the presidential candidate of the incumbent party than the increase in the unemployment rate.” Eventually, Rust Belt states were the hardest hit. “Chicago had the highest rate of negative equity among large markets,” he writes. “The surrounding states proved fertile territory for Donald Trump’s campaign.”

With rare exceptions, the Obama administration didn’t even bother to prosecute the major bankers who had gone on a veritable financial crime spree during the go-go years that led to the crisis—something that would have won it easy plaudits. And when it turned out the banks (which owned most of the mortgage servicers) were foreclosing with documents forged on an industrial scale, all the administration did was to step in and arrange a slap-on-the-wrist settlement with minor restitution. Indeed, in some states, banks were allowed to claim credit for relieving mortgage debt that it was legally impermissible to go after in the first place. In all of these cases, administration officials feared the financial instability that would result if they stopped Wall Street from committing crimes.

Some might argue that Obama and his economic team did the best they could under the circumstances. But if he had looked back at Roosevelt’s moves as president-elect and then in his first two years in office, he would have clearly seen an alternative path. After Herbert Hoover lost the presidential election in 1932, he attempted to persuade Roosevelt to embrace his disastrous status quo policies, which had only deepened the Depression. As historian Eric Rauchway writes in his book *Winter War*, Hoover took the galloping banking panic that gathered strength in the winter of 1932–33 as an opportunity to inveigle Roosevelt into continuing his conservative program of austerity, the gold standard, and fewer regulations of the market.

Roosevelt politely declined, stating that he had a democratic responsibility to carry out what he had promised. He noted further that he had no formal power until assuming office, and it would be improper to accept responsibility without authority. He suggested that Hoover should do as he saw fit until March, after which Roosevelt would chart his own course.

Hoover spun this incident into a big lie about the history of the transition, insisting that the incoming president had deliberately allowed the Depression to get worse so he could get his New Deal passed. Hoover then pushed this narrative for decades in dozens of articles and books until it became dogma in right-wing circles.

What is surprising is that Obama and his economic team accepted Hoover’s version of events. “We didn’t actually, I think, do what Franklin Delano Roosevelt did, which was basically wait for six months until the thing had gotten so bad that it became an easier sell politically, because we thought that was irresponsible,” Obama told a group of liberal writers in 2010. Letting things go to pot so as to blame the other side “was in many ways FDR’s approach in 1932,” Goolsbee tells Hundt.

The Obama administration’s embrace of Hoover’s fake history has demonstrated why Roosevelt was right to stick to his guns. In the 12 years since Obama and his team pursued their bank-friendly agenda, it has become abundantly clear that what was needed was precisely what they did not do and were unwilling to do: to drastically cut down the size of the too-big-to-fail banks, impose new regulations to make Wall Street both safer and less of a drain on the economy, and help out the many underwater homeowners they left to drown instead, as FDR did with the Home Owners Loan Corporation.

Obama’s advisers often explained many of his choices by invoking legal constraints, but there was no technical or legal reason that a more just and thoroughgoing overhaul of the financial sector, coupled with support for homeowners and the rest of the American people, couldn’t be done. The administration could have insisted that any financial company receiving government support must fire its top management, ban all bonus payments, end dividends and share buybacks, and break itself up into smaller pieces—and that any company that refused would be left to fend for itself. The Fed could also have nationalized any company whose failure posed the risk of taking down too many others with it, as it did with AIG. Directly owned companies could then have been restructured, their bad debts written off, and sold once they were sound again. This would have purged the bad debt from the system, allowed the Obama administration to actually help underwater homeowners, and reduced the power of the banking lobby, which hamstrung the administration in Congress at every turn. Hell, the government could have even hung on to some of the banks to give to the US Postal Service to set up a public option for banking.

Politics would have been an obstacle to this plan but not an insurmountable one. Obama could have insisted on stringent conditions for the TARP bill, given the fact that Democrats were providing most of the votes for its passage. “We could have forced more mortgage relief. We could have imposed tighter conditions on dividends or executive compensation,” Goolsbee admits to Hundt. Failing that, Obama could have simply bided his time until he took office. Bernanke at the Fed was a bigger obstacle, given that his term was to last until 2010, but Fed chairs are still susceptible to political pressure. For example, Obama could have threatened to publicly attack Bernanke’s policy if he didn’t go along—especially

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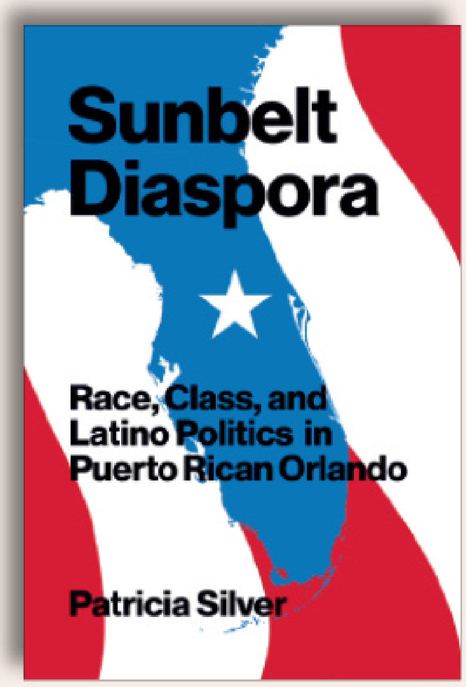

his backdoor lending programs, which he was very keen on keeping quiet. Obama could have driven the big banks into bankruptcy and forced the Fed to take action. Most obviously, he could have appointed reformers to the Federal Reserve's governing board. Instead, he left two Fed seats open for the critical first year of his administration and renominated Bernanke when his term was up.

In all likelihood, the government would have ended up owning a good portion of the American financial system for a time, though it's worth noting that then-FDIC head Sheila Bair dismisses the fears of a nationalization-induced panic. "I didn't believe in a domino effect," she tells Hundt. "If you have a controlled failure, the markets will adjust." Whatever the case, while the Republican right would have howled bloody murder—just as it did over every Obama policy—the rest of the US electorate almost certainly would have been satisfied, so long as the bankers were made to pay and regular folks got a cut of the bailout money. And the financial system would have been much more stable and far safer in the end. What happened instead was a hideously unfair and economically disastrous mess. Obama spent most of his considerable political capital on defending a cabal of corrupt, rotten financiers who very nearly ruined the world economy. His party alienated millions of voters, who felt abandoned and betrayed by the Democrats, which ended up costing them thousands of seats in state and local government. Thus, when the 2016 presidential election rolled around, Obama's successor could not even beat a tawdry game-show demagogue.

In the end, Obama made off well, personally at least; he is now collecting $400,000 fees giving speeches to the big banks while he works on producing Netflix shows. Meanwhile, Geithner is president of the private equity firm Warburg Pincus (which, incidentally, rakes in cash by tricking poor people into accepting high-interest loans), and Bernanke works for the bond firm PIMCO. Only Paulson, ironically, is working outside finance.

The rest of us, however, are still living with the consequences. Right now, an even worse financial crisis and recession appear to be in the offing because of the coronavirus outbreak, which Trump has catastrophically mismanaged. Let's hope the next person to enter the Oval Office while the financial sector is obliterating itself isn't someone willing to feed the American people once again into Wall Street's maw. ■

Echo: From the Mountains

Unicorns brought the news of human reason to the border
So we gassed them. It was unlike the echo of guitars in a stone
Cathedral or midnight's crow landing snow in a field of wheat.
Their deaths had a magpie's clarity for prophecy in the bits
Of mane, snagged flags in the tines of the border fence, prophecy
In the blood blotting the stones that winked at us as if saying you too,
You too will become the clock of your disappearance. Leviathan,
Nightstick, tear gas—the century, barely beyond its birth-
Rattle, had become a banker riding the greenback of a brown
Stallion to dust and bone. Who will shoot the century in the heart?
Who will take a selfie with the corpse wearing a sign that reads:
Your selfie will not save you from your corpse… the clock of it,
Its ruptured spleen, its begging and blank labor? Every century
Falls below the imagination of itself then takes the shape of its falling:
401(k). Roth IRA. Short-term Bond Funds. Forest fire. Instagram.
A crow is the emperor of any domain that capitulates to the whistle
And weather of crows. No angel will come and bear these migrant
Deaths beyond this bird and human reason.
Someone called it a miracle—the gassing. That it could be done
Remotely. With various devices. And no one harmed.
My father, who is dead, said it reminded him of getting a haircut
On Good Friday: "One man closes his eyes, another cuts it off."
The mark of invisibility is often mistaken for the mark of absence;
All desire is shaped by the delusion of consent.
Who has not been an entryway shuddering in the wind
Of another's want, a rose nailed to some dark longing and bled?

ROGER REEVES

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UBER CEO TRAVIS KALANICK (LEFT) AND *VANITY FAIR* EDITOR GRAYDON CARTER IN SAN FRANCISCO, 2016 (MIKE WINDLE / GETTY IMAGES)

COMPANY CULTURE

Susan Fowler's memoir of Silicon Valley

by CLIO CHANG

In Silicon Valley, every tech titan has a mythology. Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg is the boy prince turned despot. Apple's Steve Jobs is a Herculean idol. And Theranos's Elizabeth Holmes is an empress with no clothes. Depending on who you ask, the tech titans are selfish, evil, reckless, innovative, or touched by genius—anything, that is, but banal. Even among their detractors (perhaps especially for them), there is a natural affinity for this type of epical narrative.

Susan Fowler, the woman who came forward to expose sexual harassment at Uber, is no exception. In 2017, a 25-year-old Fowler published a blog post detailing how, over her yearlong stint at the company, the number of women working there dropped from 25 percent to less than 6 percent. She described a number of distressing offenses, including being propositioned by her manager in her first few weeks on the job and subsequently being punished for it. She wrote about being blocked for a transfer by another manager, who retroactively changed her performance review because keeping a woman on his team made him "look good." Fowler's post quickly went viral. Uber CEO Travis Kalanick responded by saying that the incidents she described were "abhorrent and against everything Uber stands for and believes in," but after a series of other public fuck-ups, including a video of him angrily berating an Uber driver, Kalanick was forced out as the company's leader. While there were other reasons for his undoing, Fowler's blog post helped spark his ouster. "'Twas a personal essay," *The Verge* observed, "that slew the dragon."

Fowler has now published a memoir, *Whistleblower*, to tell her side of the story. Although it focuses on her swift passage through the tech world and her explosive move out of it, the book also chronicles her childhood years growing up in poverty in Arizona; her time at college, where she experienced harassment and a hostile administration; and the multiple jobs

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she took—many of them with sexist work cultures—before landing at Uber.

Whistleblower also documents the risk and harassment Fowler faced by coming forward. After she published her post, her social media accounts were hacked, and she found herself under scrutiny by private investigators, which included being tailed. (At the time, Uber denied that it was behind the investigation, but a lawyer later sent an e-mail to Fowler confirming that she was conducting a separate investigation of her for the company.) “Part of what felt so scary was the randomness of it all,” Fowler writes. “I never knew what to expect.” Yet if *Whistleblower* offers its readers one overarching impression, it’s of Fowler’s personal resolve. For her, this is the most important lesson of her experience: that a young woman could “take fate into her own hands and speak up against injustice, even though she was afraid to do so.” When she decided to publish that blog post, she did it not as “the victim of my story, but the hero,” because the great people in history are those “who had done things in their lives, not had things done to them.”

Exceptionalism is one of Silicon Valley’s founding principles, and a little bit of that has crept into Fowler’s book. There is no denying that she has been incredibly brave, and her life story is one of David against many, many Goliaths. But there is a danger in overstating the power that one individual has. Silicon Valley is defined by systemic ills—exploitation of the gig economy, little oversight or regulation, immense wealth and power disparities—that shape the lives of its workers, and no single heroic figure, even one with a moral fortitude like Fowler’s, will be enough to overcome such structural problems.

Susan Fowler is as interesting a person as you could imagine. She grew up poor in rural Arizona, where her father was an evangelical preacher and her mother homeschooled her and her siblings. Fowler was resourceful and clever: By the age of 10, she started picking up side jobs to help her folks with the bills, working first at a venomous spider farm (called Spider Pharm) where she fed maggots to black widows and brown recluses. She also did a stint at a store called Brand New Dead Things, where she pinned dead insects to shadow boxes, and found work as a stable hand and a violin teacher. When Fowler describes getting around her parents’ strict “no boyfriend” rules by “dating girls whose families went to church,” it is hard not to be charmed.

Whistleblower
My Journey to Silicon Valley and Fight for Justice at Uber
By Susan Fowler
Viking. 272 pp. $28

As an adolescent, Fowler was extremely studious, teaching herself the subjects she needed to get into college. She struggled with depression after her father died from brain cancer, but she still managed to secure a spot at Arizona State University and later transferred to the University of Pennsylvania. At Penn, she got her first glimpse of overt gender inequity: She was harassed by a fellow student in the physics department who was going through his own mental health crisis. When she turned to the university administration for aid, it did nothing, making the student and his problems Fowler’s responsibility. When she attempted to file a complaint, the dean of graduate studies rescinded her master’s degree, and her professors stopped speaking to her, destroying her hopes of getting into a PhD program. However, this appalling treatment only reinforced her determination.

Fowler’s early disappointments led her to find work in Silicon Valley, where she took a job as an engineer at a small tech start-up. After realizing she was being overworked and underpaid in comparison with her male counterparts, she quickly moved to another start-up, where she found that her manager “was openly, unabashedly sexist” as well as anti-Semitic. In a situation that likely rings familiar to many women, she discovered that the company didn’t have an HR department. Soon, salvation appeared unexpectedly; Fowler was headhunted for a job at Uber.

The fact that 25 percent of Uber’s engineers at the time were women—a high number for Silicon Valley—was a major selling point, and Fowler hoped that the company’s culture might prove more welcoming than the places she had worked for. Yet almost immediately after starting, she was propositioned by her manager. When she reported the incident, she was told by HR that while her boss had sexually harassed her, it was his first offense (which she later found out was not the case), so the company had decided not to discipline him. Instead, Fowler was offered a choice that was really no choice at all: to remain in his group and possibly receive a bad performance review from him or to switch teams within the company.

Fowler chose the latter, but it soon became clear that sexism and harassment were not confined to one particular manager at Uber, and over the course of her time there, many of her female colleagues left. When she asked a male manager what the company was doing about the problem, he replied that he was making it a point to “talk to one woman every month.” An HR representative told her, in one of her many meetings with the department, that white men were just really “good at engineering.” Indeed, the entirety of Uber’s workplace, as described by Fowler, was rife with mistreatment and verbal abuse.

Eventually the situation became untenable for her, and she left for a job as editor in chief of a new software engineering magazine published by Stripe, a payment start-up. While at the magazine, she decided to publish her blog post, which almost immediately went viral. From that point on, her life was upended. Fowler, her friends, and her relatives were all contacted by reporters and by mysterious investigators, and she had to employ private security guards to watch her house at night. She met with Eric Holder, a US attorney general under Barack Obama, who’d been hired by Uber to conduct an independent investigation into her charges; when his abridged report was released, Kalanick was forced to resign from the company. Fowler eventually moved on to become a technology opinion editor at *The New York Times*.

Fowler ends her memoir with an anecdote about taking a Lyft ride home when the news came over the radio that Kalanick had resigned. “Can you believe it?” she recalls her Lyft driver saying. “With the sexual harassment, and the rape, and now this? That’s why I will never drive for Uber. They couldn’t treat their fancy ‘real employees’ right; why would they treat the drivers any different?” The implication is that Lyft isn’t Uber. But both are quite similar. When it comes to how they treat their drivers, the two companies are built on the same model of exploitation: classifying them as independent contractors so they don’t receive the benefits of full-time employees. This type of misclassification makes working conditions less safe, with sexual harassment and assault on the job becoming persistent problems for Uber and Lyft drivers alike.

This points to something that gets lost in a narrative that focuses primarily on individuals instead of systems. Silicon Valley has long thrived on the view that it consists of extraordinary people, geniuses who put in 80-hour weeks to build a cutting-edge industry that is changing the world. But far from being the exception, Silicon Valley exploits its workers just like any other industry. In 2018 more than 20,000 Google workers walked out on their jobs for a few hours to protest, among other issues, the way the company paid off top executives accused of sexual harassment. As one labor expert told *The New York Times*, "The myth of Silicon Valley is that all the power you need is embodied in you as an individual—if you want more money, go somewhere else. What [the employees] were saying here was that all the economic power they had as individuals wasn't enough." The walkout was a way to start combating tech ideology, putting the power of the collective above that of the individual.

There is no doubt that Uber was a highly toxic environment and that Fowler's actions while there and afterward reveal an extraordinary tenacity of character. As she points out, after she spoke up, it turned out that seemingly everyone knew about the conditions at Uber—employees, bosses, investors—yet no one did anything to change them. And it's also true that her account is a memoir, meaning that she is writing about her experiences and convictions; her book isn't meant to wrestle with the bigger, systemic questions about technology and capitalism. But as readers, we are left with only a partial view of the issues afflicting Silicon Valley and, in fact, most workplaces. The realization that Fowler took away from Uber was that she had very little power there, so she made up her mind to "never again accept a job in which I was a low-level employee, in which I was powerless." She adds that what she likes about Stripe is that power seemingly never enters into anyone's mind there the way it did at Uber.

While Uber has been particularly egregious in its flouting of employment laws, functionally, there is very little difference between it and many other companies in America. The problem wasn't that Fowler was a low-level employee but rather that low-level employees working in such companies are almost always powerless. And just because no one talks about power doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. In many workplaces, obscuring power differentials is management's favorite tool to keep those who don't have it from agitating for it. How many times during a union drive have workers heard that their company is actually just one big family?

Reading Fowler's account, I kept being reminded of the organizing line "Positions, not people." If only all people could be as exceptional as her—but in a more just world, they wouldn't have to be. What her story points to is less the need for individuals to speak up heroically than for the workers to band together as a collective to change the very structures and organization of their workplaces. What they need are unions, seats on the board, and worker-owned companies. At any moment, someone like Kalanick could become the new boss at any of the "good" companies in Silicon Valley—and just as Uber became an exemplar of horrible working conditions, so could any other workplace. No matter the determination of any one particular person, the people in charge are still more likely than not to be able to subject their workers to any sort of mistreatment and get away with it. While many would like to paint Uber as uniquely bad, the more damning truth is that it's perfectly banal.

As Anna Wiener, the author of *Uncanny Valley*, another Silicon Valley memoir published this year, said in a recent interview when asked why she chose not to identify the companies and people that appear in her book:

> The companies I worked for had specific products and things specific to the work culture, like the "remote-first" culture, but my experiences there were sort of interchangeable. There were a lot of people who worked at [other] companies and they kind of had very similar emotional dynamics, political dynamics, power dynamics in the office. I was trying to gesture to that, that this is more of a structural or systemic situation rather than that of a specific company.

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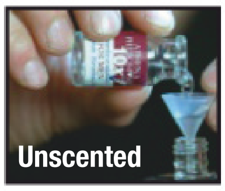

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This decision feels like a small but elegant shift in the way we're usually made to think about tech companies—a reframing that flattens their own sense of singularity. Wiener shifts from the personal to the political in a way that neatly dismantles the industry's pervasive meritocratic mythology. Doing so is a first step toward understanding that the solutions for the industry's ills are collective, not individual. After all, there is perhaps no crueler fate for a Silicon Valley golden boy than obscurity. ■

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ORION LEE (LEFT) AND JOHN MAGARO IN KELLY REICHARDT'S *FIRST COW* (ALLYSON RIGGS / COURTESY OF A24)

LEARNING HOW TO CARE

Kelly Reichardt's anti-capitalist western

by PHOEBE CHEN

In the opening moments of *First Cow*, Kelly Reichardt's latest film, the earth reveals a secret: On a riverside walk in the winter sun, a young woman and her dog uncover two skeletons lying side by side, corralled into a shallow grave by soil and time. Their discovery is a brief framing device, and we soon leap back in time to 1820s Oregon, when these bones were last animate—but the scene offers a critical vantage point for the audience. History, it proposes, is made of these terrestrial secrets, stilled beneath grand monuments and narratives of assured significance.

Reichardt's filmmaking process often feels like historical excavation. Many of her stories begin with this kind of quiet retrieval, even as her films skirt familiar genres like the western and the thriller. Hollowed of their usual climactic beats, her films stretch a moment out too long here and elide a denouement there, playing with narrative form in creative ways to challenge the lofty myths of nation making, which are, after all, really just old stories recycled to hawk false hopes. Those staples of Americana—the frontier, the road, the picket-fence reward—turn myth into expectation, make life into a cluster of norms. In *First Cow*, we return to the prelapsarian woods where some of America's founding myths were made, but Reichardt puts them under a microscope and tests the force of their aggrandizement against narratives focused on the ordinary.

Drawn from *The Half-Life*, Jonathan Raymond's sprawling debut novel, *First Cow* takes place in the borderlands of early capitalist America. The only roads in this part of Oregon are the mud tracks that score forest-side settlements. Big cities have claimed the East Coast, and San Francisco gleams in the West, but on this canopied trail there remains a last frontier ripe for new enterprise and exploitation. Into this world enters Otis "Cookie" Figowitz (John Magaro), an aptly nicknamed cook from Maryland who has been tasked with feeding a surly group of fur trappers. While foraging for mushrooms one night, he chances upon King-Lu (Orion Lee), a Chinese immigrant hiding from vengeful Russians, naked beneath the ferns and moonlight. Cookie feeds and clothes the stranger, who soon disappears; when providence throws them together again, they stay bound by mutual respect and a sense of opportunity. With milk stolen from the region's first dairy cow, owned by the town's wealthiest resident, a British trader, the two start a lucrative baking business selling nostalgia-laden oily cakes (and one truly Proustian clafouti) to the backcountry's white settlers.

The image of the frontier settlement is the ground zero fantasy of America, a place teeming with the sheer breadth of human provenance. After the forest quiet, "civilization" is all cacophony: stilted melodies from an amateur fiddler and syncopated thwacks from someone chopping wood, fires crackling in the wind, and footfalls on wet mud. Accents ricochet in the town tavern—Scottish, Russian, Irish. You can even catch another Chinese man at the market, decked in a Qing dynasty robe and red-tasseled *guanmao*. The territory's verdure is as novel to these immigrants as their strange voices are to this venerable land. It's a contrast held throughout the film, which treats the Native presence—here, the riverside Chinook tribe—as a constant visual fact, even though Reichardt refuses to subtitle any spoken Indigenous language, just as she did in her 2010 western, *Meek's Cutoff*.

The lack of on-screen translation is a perfect power inversion. After all, knowledge is about access, and these moments of respectful opacity say, "Not for you." In town or by the water, we see Chinook women in woven hats sharpening knives and axes with whetstones, engaged in their traditions of doing and making, overlooked by the avaricious settlers who would claim this "virgin" territory.

While Reichardt's two protagonists are themselves vulnerable to deceit and exploitation, she shows how they, too, might see this territory through a settler's proprietary view. King-Lu rhapsodizes about the land's "freshness" as he walks Cookie to his house for the first time, passing flimsy shacks and dying fires on the town's periphery. To Cookie, this place seems old, but King-Lu insists, "History isn't here yet. We got here early this time." And then a telling line that parrots the victor's ethos from an underdog's point of view: "Maybe this time we can be ready for it. We can take it on our own terms." Once they reach King-Lu's wooden shack, he prepares a toast. "Here's to… something," he says, laughing off the vagueness with an entrepreneur's optimism. That something is so capacious, it teases a whole off-screen world. More than halfway into the film, after they've been living together for some time, sold hundreds of cakes, and "banked" their earnings in a tree hollow, King-Lu reminds his friend, "We haven't even begun."

Their fortunes, as ever, lie farther down the winding road—away from the settle-

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Phoebe Chen is a writer and graduate student living in New York.

ment and perhaps south to California. It's an idea that Reichardt keeps returning to in her films. The road is an allegory that sustains the pioneering dream of self-making. It glows with a Bonnie and Clyde thrill for the mother of two in *River of Grass* (1994), who flees domestic ennui for an on-the-lam fantasy that loops back into tedium. In *Wendy and Lucy* (2008), it promises another life as much as it denies the protagonist and her broken car any chance of getting there. Even in *First Cow*, set in a sliver of America yet untouched by rolling asphalt, all bets are still hedged on a passage that would barrel two seekers toward a prosperous elsewhere. Reichardt offers this dream only to stage the slow revelation that the open road is a capitalist trick of deferral: Labor away with one eye on the scintillating future, and the harsh present becomes bearable.

As in her other films, *First Cow* forgoes the closure of arrival for "the small 'getting-to,'" as Reichardt put it in an interview with *Vox*. If her films can feel slow, it's because they're best described by gerunds—stories about getting to, doing, making—that are all locked into an abiding present. That she prefers to work from short stories is unsurprising, since her main narrative mode is a kind of temporal elaboration, a state of limbo. Her script contributions are mostly adjustments of pacing to match the duration of her characters' labor. It takes time to do work, to get somewhere, more time than most films would spare. This itinerant cadence might be the outcome of Reichardt's early life (she dropped out of school after 11th grade and spent the next few years working odd jobs and couch surfing), but her films are self-effacing in a way that resists the journalistic impulse toward biography as cipher. There's a clue in a comment she once made about documentaries to *IndieWire*: "When I put on a *documentary* and the *documentary* filmmaker starts making himself part of the movie, I'm out. Right away."

Save for the Florida-set *River of Grass* and a stint in Montana for *Certain Women* (2016), Reichardt has seeded some 200 years of chronicles in the varied trails of her beloved Oregon. The state's eastern side looms as a stretch of high desert in the 1845-set *Meek's Cutoff*, and its littoral south shrouds the quiet panic in *Night Moves* (2013), which sees three radical environmentalists take action in the roiling present. For all its on-screen ubiquity, it's tempting to talk about Oregon as one of her recurring characters. But watching her films, one begins to realize that the landscape is as much cowriter as versatile costar. Preproduction for Reichardt's films begins with her scouting locations for weeks or months, often alone. Her films are as much studies of lived discoveries as they are stories she comes with, ready to tell. Place and its contingencies almost always end up writing the richest scenes in her films; they help plot narrative possibilities and limit their horizons, whether she is shooting in the shady reprieve of a mesa at high noon or in the windy parking lot of a roadside diner at midnight.

As in the films of her neorealist forebears, Reichardt uses landscape to create a sense of ambiguity through withholding. Some of her characters are gripped by a loneliness that makes them taciturn; others burst from the edges of neglect in a clamorous bid to be noticed—and all, in part, because of the worlds that they occupy. This feeling of social insignificance is best expressed by the disappointed narrator in *River of Grass*, when her highway fantasy deflates toward the end. "I wasn't on the lam, after all," she admits. "I wasn't lying low, ducking cops, and if I was, no one cared. If we weren't killers, we weren't anything." Civic life is built on forms of recognition, and even criminality can place you in someone's view.

As much as by location, Reichardt's work is defined by this interest in peripheral figures and their stories. For her, their experiences are significant precisely because they are not necessarily remarkable. As she told *IndieWire*, she distrusts the "dishonest overstimulation" of some films. The lovelorn rancher in *Certain Women*, she said in a *Village Voice* interview, is drawn to "the steady beauty of a chore." *First Cow* finds a similar beauty in routine, tying scenes of Cookie's and King-Lu's household chores to wandering monologues of their various aspirations. Reichardt establishes this easy rhythm early in their cohabitation, as King-Lu sounds out a get-rich-quick scheme while Cookie plucks blueberries from a bush. Soon we see them shelling nuts and slicing vegetables at home, dreaming aloud about an almond farm or a small hotel or even a bakery with wild huckleberry pies. Their everyday conversations pool their ranging hopes, and when we hear them spoken as the two sit by the river, weaving a mat or darning a sock in view of red cedars and dappled water, even mundane toil seems its own kind of idyll—at least while there's still the chance of a grand payoff.

In the character of Cookie, Reichardt stores a goodness so beaming and innate, it's almost otherworldly. He stops in the forest to help a tiny salamander stuck on its back, says hello to the big brown dairy cow and apologizes for the mate and calf she lost on the crossing, and thinks nothing of helping King-Lu when they first meet. In an interview in *Slant* for *Certain Women*, Reichardt relayed the question that animates all her work, though it reads as a most precise summary of *First Cow*: "Do you want to live in an each man for himself world or a world where you can bump into a stranger and give the benefit of the doubt to someone you don't know?" Cookie's friendship with King-Lu seems so rare, it spins the story into something like a fable, one that teaches kindness as the only exceptionalism worth celebrating. In Reichardt's histories of the small and ordinary, the value of care not only becomes easier to see but emerges as a central conviction.

There's a scene toward the end of the film that limns another unusual relationship and stuns the viewer with its freshness—a tiny moment but enough for me to register, "I have never seen this before." King-Lu, now on the run, meets a Chinook man on the embankment and needs to travel downstream in his canoe. Desperately, King-Lu tries a few lines in Chinook Wawa before they yield to the basic language of barter: a few buttons from King-Lu's coat for the passage. Of course, the film suggests, there is a whole world of frontier encounters that rarely make their way on-screen for their lack of centering whiteness.

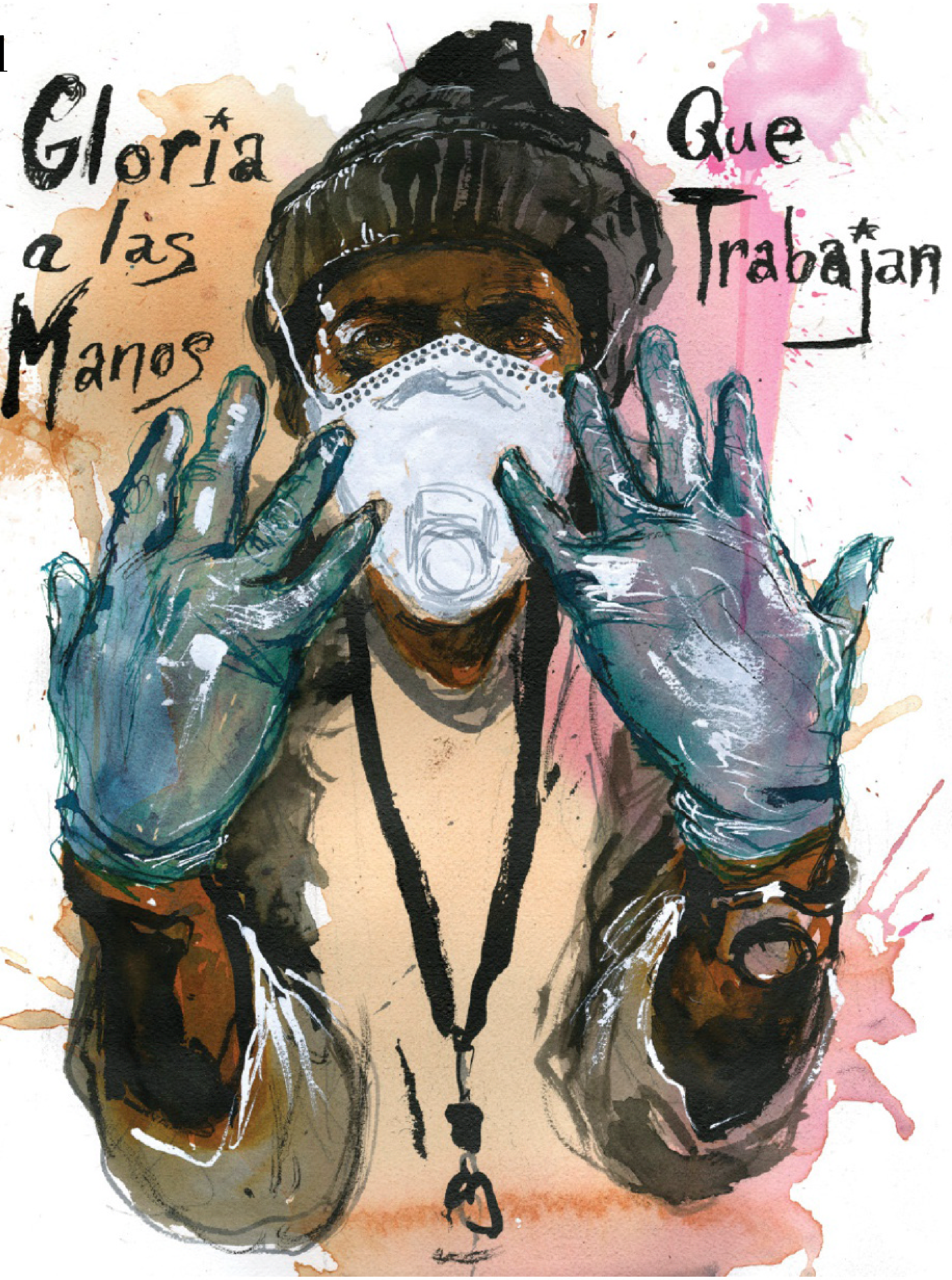
What's quietly disruptive is also the frame itself. In *Meek's Cutoff*, Reichardt worked with cinematographer Christopher Blauvelt to clip the arid vista of the desert by shooting in the tighter confines of a 4:3 aspect ratio. The landscape becomes less a boundless horizon and more a site of sloping accrual, with characters dotting the sparse and slanted planes. Caught in the same dimensions, all the scenes in *First Cow* seem to both magnify and enclose its worlds, as though its own particular smallness is the condition for observing the land's plenitude, where ferns cloak the wooded terrain and lichen-shagged branches lie close to the forest floor.

In an essay called "Seeing," Annie Dillard once wrote, "I would like to know grasses and sedges—and care. Then, my least journey into the world would be a field trip, a series of happy recognitions." Watching Reichardt's films offers us something similar; her attention is a form of generosity. *First Cow* offers a kind of gentle renewal, as if prompting us to relearn something we've done our whole lives: It reminds us how to look and, in fresh wonder, how to care. ■

MOLLY CRABAPPLE'S SKETCHBOOK

Underpaid, Ignored, and Essential

Quarantined in my apartment, I put out a call on Twitter saying that I wanted to draw those workers who could not stay at home: delivery people, shelf stockers at grocery stores, nurses, janitors, and cashiers. In the next few hours, more than 50 people wrote to me. I drew these portraits from the selfies they sent me in their work clothes. These are the underpaid, ignored, essential workers who have always made the earth move—and now are forced to risk their lives doing it.



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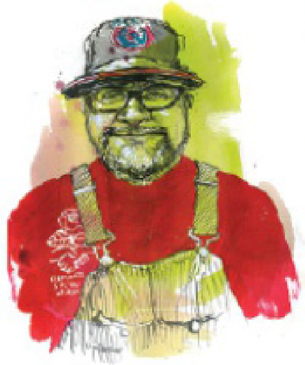

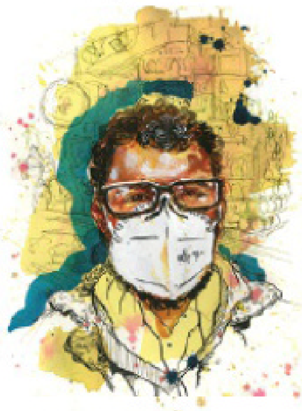

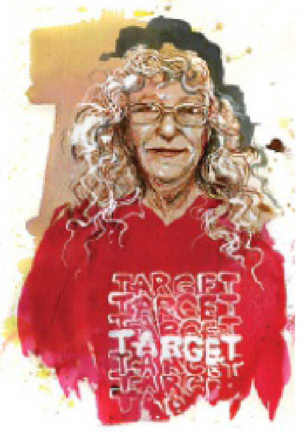

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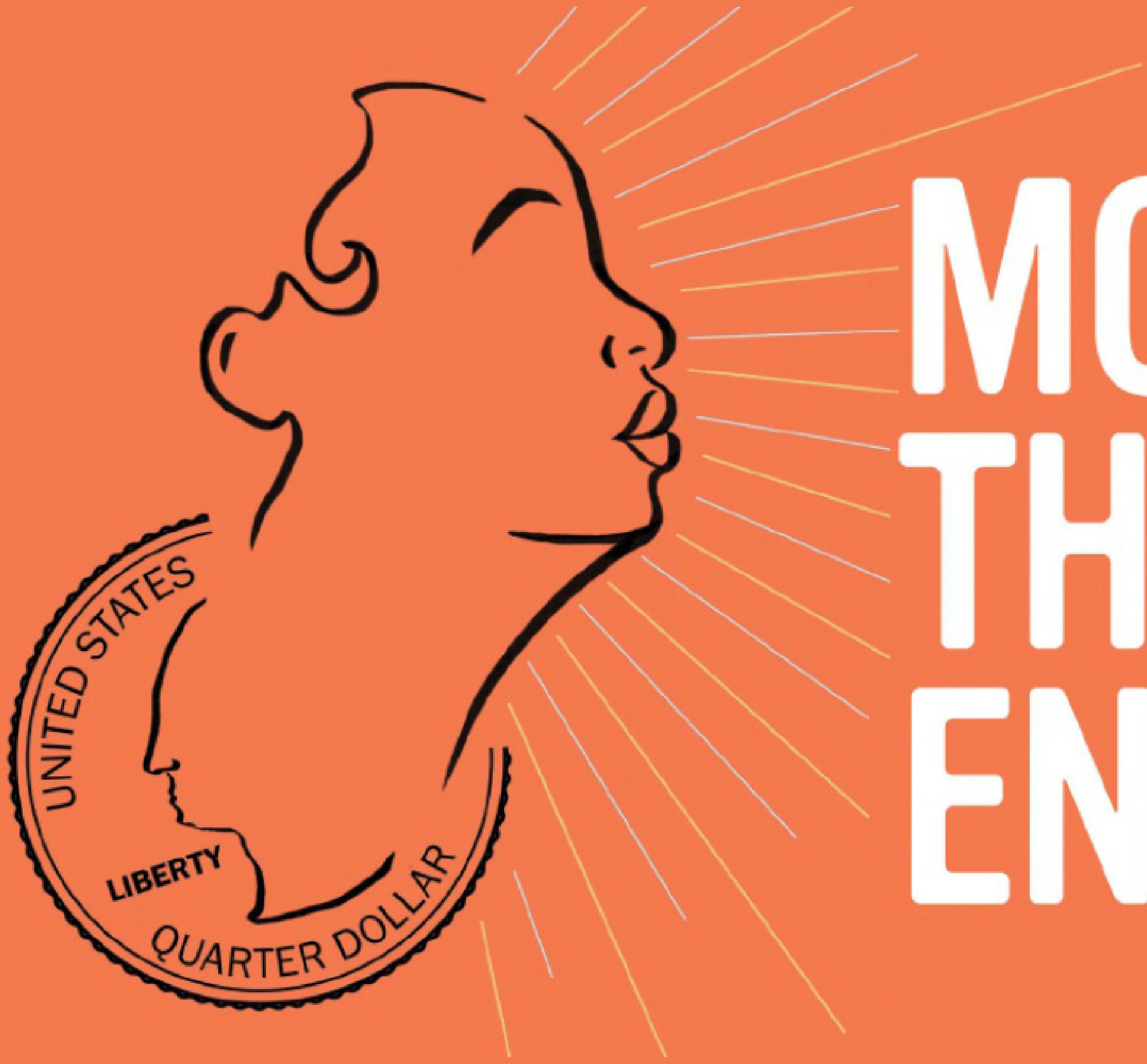

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